University of Alberta

HELEN MARIA WILLIAMS:
LIBERTY, SENSIBILITY, and EDUCATION

by

Georgina Michael-Johnston ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

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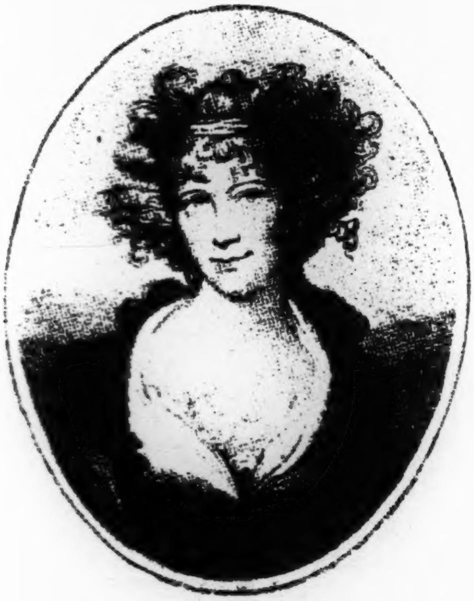

Helen Maria Williams
(1761-1827)

(Reproduced from Lionel-D. Woodward's *Hélène Maria Williams et Ses Amis* [1977] by permission of Michel-E. Slatkine, Slatkine Reprints, Geneva)

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Helen Maria Williams: Liberty, Sensibility and Education* submitted by Georgina Michael-Johnston in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the History of Education.

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ABSTRACT

Search, communicate, associate, project,
And from within the synapses of "progress"
Draw back the veil from Liberty.

As my inscription implies, the voice of Helen Maria Williams (1761-1827) is permeated by reflections on the evolution of civil libertarianism, and the association of it with aesthetics and informal citizen education. This study examines evidence of the development of her career as a radical political commentator residing on the "progressive fringes" in Britain and France. In an attempt to engage with a previously neglected aspect of Williams's contribution to intellectual history, it considers most of her published work, and illuminates the subsequent analyses with glimpses of her biography.

Williams's voice began among advocates of radical social and political reform, and the "reasonable heart and mind" of the eighteenth century Cultures of Enlightenment, Sensibility, and Dissent. They were strong influences affecting Williams's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development from her youth and early writing career in Britain to the beginning of her more radical political involvement in France. Her endorsement of "Liberty" in political, intellectual, and moral issues was derived from her informal education among leading professional educators and reform-minded radical intellectuals within her private and public sphere. Her early publications projecting criticism of colonial aggression, slavery, and the constraining

of women's roles in the public and domestic domain are indicative of her encouragement of reform of civil rights.

The more radical content and focus of her published commentaries from the early stages of the French Revolution to 1827 reveal her response to the nascent stage of more liberal citizen political engagement. I assert that challenges to her idealistic projections for "Liberty" arose in the context of her observation of the difficult process of experimentation in political evolution. In order to influence thought, and action, she consistently sought to enter her readers' intellect through their emotions.

Positioning Williams among nineteenth century exponents of liberalism places her discourse beside that of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Mill who each made a connection between politics and aesthetics. Contemporary distaste for this combination in the early nineteenth century caused its neglect and has left much to be researched.

Dedication

To my Mother

who was a constant source of inspiration

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INTRODUCTION

> Auspicious Liberty! In vain thy foes
> Deride thy ardour, and thy force oppose;
> In vain refuse to mark thy spreading light
> While, like the mole, they hide their heads in night.[1]

A Serendipitous Meeting and its Consequence

It was late in the 1980s when I first made the acquaintance of Helen Maria Williams. On one of my occasional attempts to find unusual texts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a local store with a selection of rare books, her voice intruded into my twentieth century world from the pages of four small 1796 volumes of letters. Unable to resist them, I soon found myself their owner. A search of the University of Alberta library resources revealed several more publications of Williams's prose and poetry, but any attempt on my part to find out more about her life on that occasion failed. However, the content of her letters intrigued me. I became caught up in their emotional appeal as, for example, when she characterized a letter to which she was responding as a "talisman which served to conjure up a thousand images of joys and sorrows" (*Letters* 1796, I: 2), and then proceeded to detail her experiences in revolutionary France of the late eighteenth century. Further reading took me into her world and her preoccupation with the concept of social and political "liberty." She exhibited such a freshness and intensity of feeling that the serious nature of her prime concern seemed itself to revel in freedom.

---

[1] Helen Maria Williams quoting from a poem she sent to Dr. John Moore in answer to a "Poetical Epistle" written to her from Wales. It is cited in *Letters from France* (1792, II: 11). From the first to her final publication, Williams portrayed herself as an advocate of "Liberty," of civil libertarian values, even when her ideals met opposition.

At the time I met Williams, I was in the closing stages of writing a thesis on T.S. Eliot in relation to time, communication, and liberalism. His skepticism about its claim to serve as a guardian of individual rights caused him to observe that liberalism

> tends to release energy rather than accumulate it, to relax rather than fortify by destroying traditional social habits of the people, by dissolving their collective consciousness into individual constituents, by licensing the opinion of the most foolish, by substituting instruction for education, by encouraging cleverness rather than wisdom, the upstart rather than the qualified, by fostering the notion of getting on to which the alternative is hopeless apathy, liberalism can prepare the way for that which is its own negation, the mechanized brutalized control which is the desperate remedy for chaos. (*The Idea* 12)

Eliot's fears about the potential harm of liberal ideology were so much at variance with the optimism I detected in Williams about its potential when viewed from her perspective as a late eighteenth century radical eager to encourage reform of various "traditional social habits of the people" (12). Not for her was the liberal "presentist" world of Eliot's perception a "place of disaffection / Time before and time after / In a dim light,"[2] nor "What might have been [only] an abstraction / remaining a perpetual possibility? / Only in the world of speculation" ("Burnt Norton" 117). Instead, for her the hope of "speculation" turned into reality in a belief in the "spreading light" of more liberal governments, and she exhibited the fervor of an idealist for whom the principles of "liberty" became a creed (*Souvenirs* 12). She implied that increased civil liberty would cause the realization of the potential for good in humankind. In my mind her voice and Eliot's formed a dialogue across the centuries. Eliot's pessimism about liberalism in his contemporary world contrasted with the optimism and warmth of her visions when she speculated about its future possibilities. Eliot's cynicism tempered the enthusiasm generated by Williams, who had experienced liberal ideals in their nascent stage. However, despite their differences, they both acknowledged a sense of the transcendent intruding into humanity. Eliot noted, "Destiny waits in the hands of God, / Shaping the still unshapen" (*Murder in the Cathedral* 176).

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[2] "Burnt Norton" in *Four Quartets* (120).

As ideas such as these circled in my thoughts reawakening my past interest in the eighteenth century, I entertained the hope that if I could continue studies, Williams would be the focus of my research. Little did I foresee the complications that would arise from such a decision. However, eight years later, I found myself involved in the final revisions of a dissertation on the discourse of the unusual woman to whom I had been so serendipitously introduced.

In 1930 a French scholar, Lionel Woodward, published *Hélène-Maria Williams et Ses Amis*[3] with the intent of reclaiming an "*intéressante Anglaise qui a joué pendant la Révolution française un rôle assez important, mais ignoré aujord'hui.*" [interesting Englishwoman who played an important role during the French Revolution, but is ignored today] (Preface). However, research on Williams in English has only become evident in the last ten years. Since the late 1980s, several scholars in Canada, England,

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[3] Woodward's text remains extant only in French, and was last reproduced in 1977 (Genève, [Geneva] Skatline Reprints).

and the United States have restored her contribution from the oblivion of nearly two hundred years and placed her among those women writers previously omitted from the traditional literary canon. Nevertheless, mention of her name still produces puzzled expressions.

After obtaining more access to her discourse in a variety of literary forms in poetry, novel, travelogue, translations, and further commentaries, I became convinced that she also deserved a place in the discipline of educational historiography. It became my contention that she is important primarily as a writer of political commentary in a century when women were discouraged from engaging in such an ambitious undertaking in a perceived male domain.[4] She was undoubtedly a chronicler of attempts to redirect political control, a radical activist eager to engage her readers' emotions and intellect in a predominantly "philosophical" and male dominated sphere in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Composed in a style then acceptable from women writers, Williams's early poetry and her epistolary style of communicating eyewitness accounts of political revolution were initially well received. Her descriptions of changes in the French government and citizen response to them, punctuated with the expression of her own feelings and opinions on the importance of "Liberty"--moral, intellectual, and physical--caused me to position her among publicists (in the sense of commentators on public affairs) like Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Joseph Priestley. Each of them had sought to inform others of the need for civil society to progress, to recognize more of the potential of the majority of citizens who were hindered by minimal education and with their limited access to political involvement,[5] and representation. I soon concluded that the fact that Williams was a woman who had chosen a particular type of "political" career and radical expression was the reason for her neglect, not the insignificance of her voice.

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[4] A Chronology of Williams may be found in Appendix I.

My reading of some of the poems and prose of Helen Williams left me with the impression of a woman whose keenly developed sensitivity to humanitarian issues had created in her a commitment to communicating her belief about the inevitability of the evolution of more liberal forms of government. Following her formative years between 1761 to 1781 among intellectual mentors of Rational Dissent, Williams began her literary career with the publication of poems that drew attention to humanitarian issues. For the next eight years she continued such writing in England and then went to France where she produced--among other genre--political commentaries until 1827, the year of her death.

From her earliest poetry to her final reflections on a career she termed political, Williams persisted in calling attention to the need to reform the existing social and political frameworks to reflect her notion of a seemingly predestined state for humanity by an appreciation for those "equal rights impartial Heav'n bestowed" (*Letters* 1792, I:

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[5] Wollstonecraft observed concerning the general lack of knowledge about politics: "at no period has the scanty diffusion of knowledge permitted the body of the people to participate in the discussion of political science; and if philosophy at length have (sic) simplified the principles of social union, so as to render them easy to be comprehended by every sane and thinking being; it appears to me that man may contemplate, . . . the approaching reign of reason and peace" (*Political Writings* 301).

13). Several of her lengthy poems in the 1780s invite the reader to empathize with the plight of those oppressed through civil war, colonial aggression, or slavery. When she began prose commentaries on the various stages of the attempted reformation of government in France that began in 1789, she continued her theme. She questioned: "Does some chemic power to time belong / Exacting by some process, right from wrong? / Must feudal government forever last? (13)." When sudden attempts to change legislation carried over from the previous feudal state resulted in anarchy, she reflected sadly:

> In the first days of the revolution, when liberty and philosophy went hand in hand together, what a moral revolution was instantly effected throughout Europe, by the sublime and immortal principles which this great change seemed about to introduce into government! But what eternal regrets must the lovers of Liberty feel, that her cause should have fallen into the hands of monsters, ignorant of her charms, by whom she has been transformed into a Fury . . . . (*Letters* 1796, II: 212-13)

Although impatient for a more equitable civil order, she reveals her awareness and concern about the problems created by any attempt to restructure political power noting:

> [W]hile France has been obliged to correct *her* government by holding in one hand her philosophic declarations of rights, and grasping her unsheathed sword in the other – may England effect the same august purpose with no other arms than reason – may she, without interrupting her national prosperity, employ the most effectual means of securing its continuance. (*Letters* 1792, II: 116)

Recognizing the problems of implementing new forms of legislation, Williams was critical of those who were antagonistic to the attempted changes in France. Noting that the French "in forming their new constitution, [had] made an experiment in politics"(71), she questioned "why should they be censured for so doing? . . .While philosophy teaches the general utility of experimental science, who would be bold enough to assert, that the science of government alone has attained perfection, and is incapable of improvement?"(71). Optimistically she asserted that " Liberty springs from knowledge, as light from the sun" (70). After experiencing the violence accompanying the initial changes that had so shocked observers in other parts of Europe, she queried whether observers should "because the fanatics of liberty have committed detestable crimes, conclude that liberty is evil, and prefer the gloomy tranquility of despotism?" (204). Following the later autocratic government of Napoleon, she remained hopeful that "the ever-sacred name of liberty (would) become the order of the day of the nineteenth century" (*Narrative of Events* 1815: 225). Observing in her final reflections published in 1827, that " *pour dernier résultat, que la marche des peuples modernes se dirige vers la liberté, et par conséquent vers le bonheur* [6]"*(Souvenirs* 1827: 200), Williams concluded "*l'Europe du 19th siècle, ne se soumettra qu'à l'empire de cette force toute morale qui s'appuie sur la raison. La France doit surtout chercher à acquérir cette vertu civique*[7] . . ." (200).

To Williams, and *philosophes* like Marie-Jean Condorcet, more "perfect systems" (*Letters* 1792, II: 114) depended upon the implementation of a national system of education. The connection she perceived between the prospects of a more equitable civil order and education is first evident in the second of her eight-volume series of letters from France written and published between 1790 and 1796. Williams's faith in the ameliorating effects of education whether formal or informal, and in more humanitarian political and social responses become clear. She suggests that the "occasional evils which have happened in the infant state of liberty, are but the effects of despotism," that men "have long been treated with inhumanity, there fore (sic) they are ferocious," and "have long been ignorant and have not yet attained sufficient knowledge" (204). To her, it was only a matter of time before society would evolve "more perfect" social and political systems for releasing the positive, creative, progressive vitality of citizens, since "if the blessings of freedom are abused, it is only because they are not well understood" (204).

---

[6] "as a last result the direction of modern people is towards liberty, and consequently towards happiness"

[7] "nineteenth century Europe will submit itself to the strength of this moral force based on reason. France will above all search to acquire civic virtue . . ."

From my research into her publications from 1782 to 1827, I became convinced that her concern about liberty--and the creation of a more just civil order--could be traced throughout her discourse. I concluded that, by informing others about her beliefs, she was attempting an informal educative process about the merits of legislative reform by an appeal to her readers' intellect through their emotions. My reasons for believing that this was her intent will be discussed in Chapter I. They are based on her own assessment of the effectiveness of the manner in which others communicated by expressing their feelings, and her contention that there should not be a distancing between sensation and intellect.

Recent studies on Williams include Gary Kelly's focus on her feminization of revolution (1994); Chris Jones's positioning of her in the discourse of "radical" sensibility (1995); and Elizabeth Bohl's assessment of her French commentaries as travelogue (1997). Perceiving Williams to be a writer whose use of her craft educated adults about the need to experience political involvement and engagement at some level, I began the process of producing evidence to show her importance to educational historiography. She inferred that only by encouraging others to attain sufficient knowledge could the evolution of a more just and equitable civil society occur. To provide evidence of this, I surveyed most of her extant discourse, and those details of her life that have been accessible to me.

Williams left no autobiography, and only a few of her personal letters and papers are available. Thus, an understanding of her life must be obtained primarily from her responses to her times reflected in her public discourse, from comments by her contemporaries, and inferences that can be drawn from her social contacts in England and France. In the course of attempting to address the issue which initiated my research, I discovered--as other sources became available to me--that the educational intent I had ascribed to her work could be further substantiated by her observations about the connection between education and more liberal forms of government. Williams clearly indicates her belief in the importance of formal and informal education to any successful future political and civil reform. In the second of her eight volumes of letters from France, she expresses the opinion that "the improvement of the rising generation cannot but be highly interesting to the friends of the French Revolution, since it is seems particularly for them that the revolution has been made" (*Letters* 1792, II: 118). Associating this with the increased liberalism resulting from more enlightened forms of government, she observes:

> We see the blessings of enlightened freedom amongst them, and we rejoice that a suitable education will qualify them to enjoy their distinguished lot; that they will be made worthy of their high destiny, and be fit guardians of that better order of things which they are called upon to maintain. (119)

To provide evidence for Williams's main concern in her self-acknowledged political career, I have attempted to trace the influences that determined her humanitarian focus, and her responses. Further research was needed into the educational theories that influenced Dissenting education and concepts of Liberty extant in political thought in the mid-eighteenth century in determining the types of intellectual influences on her formative years. These ranged from the writings of British Rational Dissenting intellectuals like Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, and Thomas Paine; French *philosophes* such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Marie-Jean Condorcet; and American revolutionaries like John Adams and James Madison, who were influenced, as Williams noted, by British philosophers like John Locke and Algernon Sidney (115). Her association with Benjamin Constant in the later years of her life is an indication of her continued interest in such issues. In 1819 Constant became the leader of liberal opposition in the Chamber of Deputies after the Bourbon Restoration.

Williams's method of expressing her concerns led me into further research on the emotive literary style of eighteenth century Sensibility that suffused her discourse. In her attempts to inform and provoke her readers, a sensitivity and humanitarian concern becomes apparent throughout her writing. It accords with the theory of "radical" sensibility presented by Chris Jones. I have also considered it important to retain a concern that the art form she employs be acknowledged as a vital component in itself, as Jerome McGann has argued in *The Poetics of Sensibility* (1996). While acknowledging Williams's role in the feminization of the French Revolution presented by Gary Kelly, I have focused more directly on those aspects of her reformist intent regarding the issue of Liberty.

Evidence for the main research issue that I pursued is presented in the following study within the framework of Williams's texts and biographical details. By using her varied publications to set the parameters of Chapters II to VIII, I have attempted to indicate that Williams was able to sustain the libertarian, natural rights principles that informed the 1688 English revolution--and prompted later revolutions in France and America--beyond the point to which it was taken by most writers who began their reformist rhetoric in the 1780s. There were few women's voices that remained consistently focused on political thought in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Fewer still experienced and commented on it in the manner achieved by Williams. In outliving Mary Wollstonecraft, who Gary Kelly notes, had "hoped to emulate Williams's literary and political career" (1995), she remained the only woman to write persistently on those fundamental issues which had so inspired the English revolutionists in 1688. I contend that she saw herself as an advocate of the ideals which had concerned such reformers, and that she identified the focus of her literary political career with issues that motivated the radicals who sought political reform during her lifetime.

From the perspective of the closing years of the twentieth century it is possible to acknowledge that she was correct in her assumption that more equitable legislation would evolve in Europe. However, there are no indications that any civil order has found a way of overcoming the "rapacious and degenerate" (*Letters* 1792) aspects present in humanity. In characterizing Williams as a "preacher of liberty," Henry Crabb Robinson, a fellow Dissenter and diarist, captures part of the essence of Williams's intent as a spokeswoman for political and social re-visioning. In part, such reform has always relied upon the manner in which people are educated whether formally or informally, as she observed in her hope that the "rising generation" would be positively affected by the French Revolution (*Letters* 1792, II: 118). At the end of her life, her lifelong humanitarian concern was still evident. She expressed the expectation that a more enlightened and liberal order would ultimately prevail. Throughout the centuries, educational theorists have sought a similar end to the one Williams envisioned: the evolution of a society "worthy of the human race" (14).

CHAPTER I

Towards a "Better Order of Things"

> I have lived to see the diffusion of knowledge, which has undermined superstition and error – I have lived to see the rights of man better understood than ever, and nations panting for liberty, which seemed to have lost the idea of it.
>
> Richard Price *Discourse* 1789

> It is the business of knowledge to teach men their real *interests*.
>
> Catherine Macaulay *On Burke's Reflections* 1790

> [The American and French Revolutions] teach the doctrines of liberty, civil and religious, with infinitely greater clearness and force than a thousand treatises on the subject.
>
> Joseph Priestley 1790

> We see that the blessings of enlightened freedom await them, and we rejoice that a suitable education will qualify them . . . [to be] fit guardians of that better order of things which they are called upon to maintain.
>
> Helen Maria Williams *Letters* 1792:119

The quotations introducing this chapter from a sampling of eighteenth century liberal thought are indicative of the attitudes of its advocates. The discourse of reform-minded radicals like the Rational Dissenter, Richard Price,[9] one of the leading exponents of civil liberty in England, provides a sense of the libertarian political theory that pervaded the intellect and emotion of Helen Maria Williams, who supported the republican "experiments" in both America and France in the late 1700s.

---

[9] In a letter to Ezra Stiles from Hackney, March 22, 1788, Price commented: "May I, sir, congratulate you on the probability that the new federal constitution will be (or perhaps *has* been) adopted by the united states? This must save them from some of their greatest dangers, and I hope, will be a means of blessing them with that weight of credit and well-guarded liberty which I wish them to enjoy, but which cannot be enjo'd without some such efficient government and general controuling power as this constitution is meant to establish" (*The Correspondence of Richard Price* I:166).

Williams evolved into an advocate and apologist for principles implied by the term "Liberty," and fundamental to issues concerning increased civil liberty, and civic virtue. Such principles included "concepts of *freedom, progress* and *mastery* . . . taken as expressing the core of Enlightenment thinking [and] closely related *to reason* and *education*" (Schouls 1). Drawing on Locke's theories in *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), Mary Wollstonecraft contended in *A Vindication of the Rights of Me*[10]*n* (1790): "The birthright of man . . . is a degree of liberty, civil, and religious, as it is compatible with the liberty of every other individual with whom he is united in a social compact, and the continued existence of that compact"[11] (*Political Writings* 7).

According to Isaiah Berlin, the classical view of "civil liberties or civilized values" are in part or wholly expressed "in various declarations of the rights of man in America and France, and in the writings of men like Locke, Voltaire, Tom Paine, Benjamin Constant, and John Stewart Mill" (*History* 486). It assumed that in the private sphere the individual had the right to personal autonomy providing it did "not interfere with the similar rights of others, or undermine the order which makes this kind of arrangement possible" (486). Williams's advocacy was not confined to the eighteenth century. In 1815, she speculated that "the long profaned but ever sacred name of liberty will become the order of the day in the nineteenth century" (*Narrative* 225). It is my contention that there is sufficient evidence to position Williams among the minority of published radical writers who sought to inform the public about their responsibility to monitor abuse of political power by reminding them of natural rights theories to which radicals like Priestley, Price, Macaulay, Paine--and Williams--subscribed. In the eighteenth century, the majority of men and women received education that fitted them for limited spheres of effectiveness in the political domain. Most commonly, their exposure to education was intended to enable them to acknowledge and perpetuate the status quo of socio-political structures that limited moral, intellectual, and physical freedom--especially for women. As noted in the preface, Williams retained a positive focus on the notion of a progressive role for Liberty despite problems she observed and experienced during French attempts to transfer from a feudal system to a more equitable distribution of political power and representation.

---

[10] Written in response to Burke's *Reflections of the French Revolution* (1790).

Richard Price, whose comments on French attempts to reform their despotic system led to British fear of republican values disturbing the stability of their more enlightened constitutional monarchy[12], addressed the vitality of certain concepts relevant to his political viewpoint in 1789. A "wise and strenuous advocate of every species of liberty" (*Monthly Magazine* 1791), he observed that " the chief blessings of human nature are truth, virtue and liberty, [and to] support these is to show love of country . . . and promote its welfare" (*Sermon* 1789). There were other radicals, who published reminders of the seventeenth century English revolution in government resulting in the limitation of monarchical power and the initiation of a process of increased political representation. The British historian, Catharine Macaulay, attempted to appeal to the conscience of her readers concerning political progress achieved after 1688. Other writers called attention to the republican progress in America. Joseph Priestley, Thomas Paine, and Jacques-Pierre Brissot were among the minority of political agitators seeking to inform the public about the evolving possibilities for government reform, the implications of which were fully understood by relatively few activists. Their effectiveness in inspiring readers was disproportionate to their numbers, and unfortunately, the general education level rendered their optimism for swift change imprudent. Influenced by the rigors of Rational Dissenting thought which caused her to prize "rationality and the empirical pursuit of knowledge" (Kennedy 79), and exposed her to a range of literary and political discourses, Williams evidently had the ability and motivation to absorb the radical political tendencies of her libertarian associates, and to maintain them throughout her life.

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[12] Williams remained patriotic and expressed pride in the British Constitution.

A close reading of Williams's extant work, with a focus on her considerable use of the expression "liberty," clearly indicates her subscription to very similar principles to those of the reformers and publicists alluded to above. As a result of my awareness of the development of her interests and concerns, evident in opinions that intersperse all her texts, I have endeavored in the course of this study to provide evidence of her particular position among advocates of libertarian and republican ideals. The term "liberty" is frequently used by her to provoke thought about the necessity of investigating its significance to the progress of civil society. The emotive nature of the eighteenth century style of sensibility suffused her writing throughout her career creating a discourse which "seldom fail[ed] to interest the feelings of humanity" (*Monthly Review* Nov. 1796: 126).

At the time of Williams's first publications in the 1780s, her circle of association included members of the salons of leading British women intellectuals such as Elizabeth Montagu. She was also acquainted with members of the societies that attracted political reformers. Her earliest mentor from among a distinguished group of intellectuals of Rational Dissent, Andrew Kippis, and John Hurford Stone, her partner from 1794 to his death in 1816, were members of the Society for the Commemoration of the Revolution of 1688, and the Corresponding Society (Woodward 1). Meetings and correspondence brought together other liberal radicals in the 1780s and early 1790s such as Abraham Rees, James Mackintosh, Thomas Thelwall, Richard Sheridan, Thomas Holcroft, John Horne Tooke, Joseph Priestley, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Thomas Paine, and Joel Barlow (2). All were politically active, agitating through publications, lectures, or correspondence debating and connecting ideas about British and American political reform, and encouraging their French counterparts.

From evidence of the associates among those already referred to, and others who will become evident as friends and correspondents of Williams as the study unfolds, I have concluded that from the intellectual climate of her youth, and from her adult experience of various stages of attempted reform in France, Williams was always closely involved with those who promoted liberal political change in a variety of formats and contexts.

Williams's initial injection of her humanitarian concern through poetry was intended to appeal to the sensibility of her readers. It was expressive of her own sensibility--connoting compassion and empathy--and prompted consideration of reform in legislation that could reduce the devastation, and the stifling effects of civil war, colonial aggression, and slavery on individual and national potential. When she chose to adopt France and its politics as an arena for political prose commentaries from 1790 to 1827, her sustained adherence to the culture of sensibility caused her to use the intimate and immediate appeal of the epistolary style. By so doing, her eyewitness accounts of events "as they passed before [her] eyes," or commentaries of her acquaintances punctuated by her emotional responses to the fate of liberty and its adherents, attempted to engage the readers' intellect through their emotions. For this reason, she espoused a "political" career (*Souvenirs* 6), and not that of a traditional historian. She recognized her lack of attempt at "objective," meditated fact whether attempting to convey the realism of the effects of liberal progress, the devastation caused by the lack of understanding of political issues by the populace, or the ambitious tendencies of successive French leaders.

The Heart of a Radical Publicist

A major intent of this study is to provide evidence that Williams may be positioned among those who sought to transmit knowledge that would encourage political evolution towards a more equitable distribution of power, one of greater civil liberty including freedom of expression, religion, and commercial involvement. A reading of the guiding principles of the publication of the *Monthly Magazine*, which was among several journals that reviewed Williams's work until 1819, provides an example of the reasoning that motivated representatives of the liberal press. In the preface of the first edition of the periodical, and repeated at intervals over the years after, is the following statement of its intent:

> When the Monthly Magazine was first planned, two leading ideas occupied the minds of those who undertook to conduct it. The first was that of laying before the Public various subjects of information and discussion, both amusing and instructive; the second was that leading to the progress of those liberal principles respecting some of the most important concerns of mankind, which have been either deserted or virulently opposed by the Periodical Miscellanies, but upon the manly and rational support of which the Fame and fate of the age must ultimately depend. (Aug. 1816: 42)

It is among the publications of such periodicals and writers indicated earlier in this chapter that I contend Williams's discourses belong. Unlike her friends, Stephanie de Genlis and Mary Wollstonecraft, Williams did not contribute to the production of educational texts advising on the rearing and education of children. Her contribution to public education was to inform readers in Europe (Stanislas-Jean de Boufflers translated the second volume of Williams's *Letters* into French), and America about liberal and humanitarian principles, to record the response to the different stages of the French revolution between 1790 and 1819, and also to monitor the condition of "liberty" in the cantons of Switzerland in 1794. Her translations of Bernadin de St. Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* in 1793, and of several volumes of Alexander de Humboldt's travels in South America in 1814 also served as a type of educative material.

As will be seen in the following chapters, Williams was interested in continuing her education. An example of this is her delight in and support of lectures at the Lycée[13] in Paris in 1790. She expressed the wish that such a system of public lectures could exist in England for adult education as an alternative to the type of evening assemblies given over to card playing and gossip (*Letters from France* II: 132).

Williams's lifelong attendance at and hosting of salons which included statesmen, philosophers, writers and artists both in England, and to a greater extent in France, indicates her own intention of being involved in political, intellectual, and artistic developments as they evolved in her milieu. Evidence will also be presented of her concern that the lack of a national system of education was an impediment to progress believing as she did in the theories of Locke and Helvétius, that education determined the nature of man. She also espoused the perfectibility theories not only those of *philosophes* like Marie-Jean Condorcet, but those inculcated in her early years of association in Rational Dissent. As Anthony Lincoln observes:

> Underlying the belief [that education should fashion good citizens] was a psychological creed, derived from the school of sensation and experience; a creed to which all [Rational Dissenters] subscribed, some with such an ardent faith that to attain to a millennium in human affairs by means of education seemed a simple and rational aspiration. In a child's mind resides the *tabula rasa* described by Locke; taken in its unformed state, and principles of a good life, true notions of virtue, mental flexibility, candour, benevolence, the love of God and knowledge of His laws could be written indelibly upon it. All depended on time and care. All knowledge comes from experience, but education is anticipated and "there is no arguing against experience." (68-9)

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[13] Williams notes: "Lectures are given at the Lycée by the most celebrated professors at Paris, on natural history, botany, history, and *belle lettres;* and Greek, Italian, French and English are taught." (*Letters* 1792, II: 130-1).

My rationale for positioning Williams among those who sought to transmit knowledge that would encourage a process of evolution in political theory, and the involvement of a more informed citizenry, is prompted by her evident recognition of the limited nature of any national systems for majority education during her writing career, and her awareness of implications of this impediment to the progress of civil liberty. In the course of the following study, evidence is presented which makes it clear that her contributions to publications drawing attention to the need to inform, and to provoke intellectual-emotional engagement in such a process, existed as a motivating force. This sustained her throughout her long career as a political commentator on attempts to develop a more libertarian outlook towards the development of countries in both Europe and America. In her early poem, *Ode on the Peace* (1783), may be found evidence of her support for American independence, and her delight in a peace that would allow more concentration and freedom to develop arts, science, and commerce--each vital to more progressive thought. In her French commentaries, she echoed the outlook of her friend Jacques-Pierre Brissot, a major contributor to the first French Constitution following the 1789 revolution. With Jean-Marie Condorcet, he attempted the entrenchment of the "Rights of Man" envisioned by Thomas Paine. After a visit to North America in 1788,[14] Brissot declared the necessity of "estimating individuals by their talents, and not by their birth," since from neglect of this "there can be no great commerce, but aristocratical men will abound; that is men incapable of conceiving any elevated view; men contemptible, not in a state to produce them" (*Travels*: 1792: 4-5).

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[14] Brissot was in America as a French representative to the *Societé des Amis des Noirs*.

Following several volumes of commentary written between 1790 and 1794, Williams was obliged to flee to Switzerland from the anarchy during the years of Robespierre's regime. Between 1794 and 1796 she wrote four more volumes of commentary covering the years from 1793 to the Constitution of 1795. The intent of the commentary in her 1794 travels through Switzerland, and published in 1798, was not merely to produce a travelogue, but to provide an assessment of the effects of libertarian thought generated by the Revolution on the Swiss cantons, and to compare the two countries. Disappointed by her findings, she "discerned neither the love of arts, of literature, of liberty, or of any earthly good, but money" (1798: 5). Returning to France with optimism for a new order and progress promised by the Napoleonic regime, she remained to comment--often disillusioned by successive government changes--on the fluctuating attitudes towards liberal thought until her death in 1827.

Willliams's final work as an apologist for liberty, *Souvenirs*, again reinforces the fact of her consistency. Optimistically avowing her principles to the end of her career, she assumes the evolution of increased civil liberty[15] in the later nineteenth century. In this regard, she is a precursor of the liberal theories epitomized by a representative of the country of her birth, John Stewart Mill, and a friend of her final years, Benjamin Constant, who became leader of the liberal Opposition in the French government four years after the Bourbon Restoration. Richard Bellamy observes that:

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[15] Wollstonecraf noted comments of Locke on civil liberty in the French *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (1789), and asserted that "in spite of the fatal errours (sic) of ignorance, and the perverse obstinacy of selfishness," the Declaration was "converting sublime theories into practical truths"(*Political Writings* 300).

> Constant's liberalism grew out of a critique of the ideas of his compatriot Rousseau that was sparked off by their employment by the Jacobins during the French Revolution . . . In the ancient republics that inspired Rousseau's works, freedom had been inspired primarily in collective terms and had involved participation in the life of the polity in order to secure it. (159)

Williams attempted to encourage thoughts like those of her associates such as the ones observed in the introductory epigraphs. However, "within modern societies, in contrast, liberty was eventually individualistic in nature"(160). After this redirection of the notion of a common good, Constant recognized "that public welfare could only be promoted by protecting the ability of individuals to pursue their private ends . . . by freely contracting and exchanging with each other in the market" (159). This government is best achieved not through a direct forms of participatory democracy, since unrestricted popular sovereignty could prove as tyrannous as the unrestricted monarch, but "by liberal constitutional mechanisms such as representative democracy, the separation of powers and a bill of rights" (159).

By presenting the above survey, it has been my intent to provide glimpses of evidence to be developed in this study in which I focus on Williams's consistent attachment to civil libertarian thought, the publication of discourses that encouraged consideration of political issues related to it, and of other exponents who shared her life experience. It has been necessary to trace her associations from an early age to the time of her death in her mid-sixties to create a better understanding of her contribution to intellectual history. Because of environmental circumstances, whether occurring naturally or by choice, and though associations cultivated within them, Williams remained always among those whose socio-political beliefs accorded with her own.

Following the influence of her earliest mentor, Andrew Kippis, who espoused the need for liberty of moral and intellectual conscience, and practiced political participation though publications and speech, Williams gravitated to the company of men and women who were instrumental in attempting to apply such principles to move the feudal state of Europe[16] into the direction of the republican ideals observed in the new states of America. Within the context of the emotional and intellectual support she experienced, she sustained her belief that the liberalization of society was inevitable despite the setbacks she witnessed.

Another aspect of Williams's life requiring explanation to provide an understanding of her attitude towards socio-political development was the origin and importance of her religious development. It is also my contention that her liberal principles were strengthened by precepts that accompanied the spiritual dimension of her life. On several occasions she expresses her conviction that the "Parent of the human race" (*Letters* 1790: 134) could not have intended other than the evolution of its better potential. This reasoned and emotionally integrated position assured her consistency of thought, and explains some of the optimism evident in the maintenance of her principles. In her private life, the chosen companion of her more intimate experiences, a fellow Dissenter and friend of Price and Priestley, John Hurford Stone, would have helped sustain her emotional commitment. He was also an advocate for liberty, and is most likely a contributor to her collection of letters. In the Treason Trials of 1792-6, he is quoted at the trial of his brother, William, as observing:

> The Dissenters, who are much more numerous (than the aristocrats) are the most enlightened body of the nation; they are steady Republicans, devoted to liberty, and through all the stages of the French Revolution have been enthusiastically attached to it. (Howell *State Trials* 1804: 1317)

Williams's attitudes to Liberty evolved steadily through her publications from 1782 to 1827. Most of the issues, which are the focus of her concern and the opinions she expresses, are filtered through her belief in the gradual broadening of the knowledge base and the advancement of civil liberty in European and American society, together with her Rational religious faith.

It was this awareness that led me to conclude that she was indeed a publicist and apologist for "liberty" not only as it emerged in the varied stages of the French revolution to 1819, but in eighteenth and nineteenth century liberal thought generally. Consequently, I have endeavored to link the themes of liberty and education, by providing evidence of the intent of her publications. She continued when issues which concerned her were evident only as marginalized ideological movements, and even when a revival of conservatism and anti-revolutionary rhetoric in political thought ran counter to her principles.

Although she was not a writer of formal educational texts, Williams provided a means of educating the public by attempting to provoke them to consider the merits of

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[16] Williams commented in verse to Dr. John Moore: "Must feudal governments forever last? / Those Gothic piles, the work of ages past; / …Where lives one tyrant and a host of slaves?" (*Letters* 1792, II:12)

increased civil liberty, and their degree of responsibility in promoting it. This required the type of education with which she would have been familiar--although as a girl she would not have been able to attend any of the Rational Dissenting academies that provided an education for boys, which encouraged debate and a constant search after truth by reasoned discussion. There seems to have been some occasions of grudging admiration for its results. Of Joseph Priestley, a leading exponent of the educational philosophy influencing the academies, it was observed by a contributor to *The English Review:* "we heartily wish his education had been such to include him amongst us [the Establishment educational and religious system]. A mind so capacious, a heart so enlivened with benevolence, and the powers of reasoning so abstractedly from all common rules, *must* adorn every society" (1791: xvii 58).

Basic texts included those by John Locke, Samuel Puffendorf, and David Hartley. As noted above, periodicals such as the *Monthly Magazine*, and the *Critical Review* attempted to provide access to knowledge and other sources of opinion which would foster such critical involvement. Only a minority had access to such literature by virtue of a limited educational philosophy of education in the eighteenth century, which sought to perpetuate the hierarchical ordering of society that disadvantaged a majority of people. However, by the mid-eighteenth century, increased wealth, a demand for improved education and political representation among the burgeoning middle class began the process. It led to a broadening of the knowledge base, but for the majority, it was to be a slow advancement through the nineteenth century.

Some informal education naturally arose from the writers of poetry and novels.

Initially these were used by Williams. As a poet who wrote on politically sensitive issues like colonialism, slavery, and morality, Williams was popular in the 1780s and 90s, but when she became more radical in her political commentaries from France, she was denigrated by supporters of the social and political status quo. Undaunted, she displayed an indifferent attitude, but later acknowledged her consciousness of the problem when observing: "I am aware of the censure which has been thrown on writers of the female sex who have sometimes employed their pens in political subjects" (*Sketches* 1801 Preface).

The intimate epistolary style of most of William's commentaries was initially popular with those who sought travelogues, memoirs and novels, but by the end of the eighteenth century, Williams experienced difficulty in publishing her commentaries. When the counter-revolutionary movement occurred, vitriolic attacks by the anti-Jacobin press in England limited her voice. (The term "jacobin" was often incorrectly applied to those agitating for reform) However, the fact that although she continued to be published despite attempts to discredit her work, and that some periodicals--at least until 1819--continued to review her work, indicates that she succeeded in sustaining a degree of interest and concern for the effectiveness or influence of her opinions among a liberal minority. News of her death in 1827 records the passing of the "celebrated Helen Maria Williams" together with mention of the demise of the son of Madame de Staël, and the son of Arthur Young (*Monthly Magazine:* Jan 1828: 107). Their respective parents had been well known throughout Europe for their publications in support of radical change, albeit on different issues.

In the following chapters, I trace Williams's career as a radical voice among those like Price, Priestley, Paine, Macaulay, Wollstonecraft, Brissot and Constant, each of whom wished to convey opinions that might prompt a political organization to be more responsive to the process required to produce an increasingly knowledgeable citizenry capable of facilitating the evolution of progressive forms of civil society. Williams produced a discourse extending throughout her life, which is important for its concentration on the theme of reducing the perpetuation of the "secret of tyranny"--ignorance (*Souvenirs* 1827).

The Voice of Williams

Since it is the intent of this research to provide evidence of the themes of liberty and education in the work of an eighteenth century woman writer, a consideration of her historiography involves issues debated in present theories on feminist writing. An important aspect of Williams's voice is its subjectivity, its self-revelation. It serves to integrate her principles with her lived experience. Both areas exhibit the autonomy she displays in her method of conveying inferences about them.

Williams acknowledges the difference accorded to women by the assumption of their greater ability to "feel" whether in terms of personal experience or in empathy with that of others. To appreciate the dilemma expressed by those in a position to influence public opinion through their publications, a sample of eighteenth century journalistic comment is indicative of the problem that was thought to exist in writings like those of Williams. While acknowledging positive qualities, a reviewer in the

Critical Review commented in September 1792 that if Williams's *Letters from France*

> want the profound investigation of the statesman or legislator, - if they are destitute of those political discussions, in which historians of a higher order are fond of indulging, - will be found to contain something what is more valuable, - a picture of the times . . . they delineate correctly the fluctuations of popular sentiment; . . . and by a variety of engaging anecdotes, expose the human heart. (68)

Another commentator on her first two volumes of *Letters* for the *Monthly Magazine* noted that her language

> soars to regions of eloquence and of pathos; and if it will not . . . secure the frigid plaudits of the philologist, it will seldom fail to interest the feelings of humanity, and (party prejudice aside) it will command the approbation of the heart. (326)

The ability to communicate feelings in her discourse was important to Williams. She appreciated subjectivity and expression of emotion in others. When commenting on the "persuasive eloquence" of a pastor at the French Protestant church of St. Thomas de Louvre, Williams observed that it "is not the reasoning but the sentimental part of religion that softens every evil to which humanity is subject"(187-8). She expressed regret that in comparison some English clergy were not so "persuasive." Williams also defended her style as being more natural to a woman than the more "objective" style approved for discourse with "serious" content such as political or religious issues. In validating the subjective in accounts of personal experience, the type evident in William's discourses, Joan Scott observes that they have been valuable to historians. They expose "a wealth of new accounts previously ignored" and by so doing have " drawn attention to dimensions of human life and activity usually deemed unworthy of mention in conventional histories" ("Experience" 1992: 24).

In *Women's History as Women's Education*, Scott cites Jill Conway's justification for the study of women's history that "western culture has seen female generativity as incompatible with intellectual life and has seen the exercise of power by women as anomalous and dangerous" (Davis 1985: 23). It is possible to see this reflected in statements expressing views that were current in the eighteenth century. François Fénelon, who, while asking "who can civilize and govern (families) with a nicer discrimination than women?" (1687: trans. 1707), also observes "what intrigues . . . what subversions of laws and morals - what bloody wars - what revolutions of states [does history present us] all arising from the irregularities of women" (*Education*: Jones 103). Writing specifically to Williams in 1793, Laetitia Matilda Hawkins expressed another common view when she informed her that: "The study, my dear madam, which I place in the climax of unfitness, is that of politics; and so strongly does it appear to me barred against the admission of females, that I am astonished that they ever ventured to approach it" (Jones 120).

Williams involved herself in politics by associating with those involved in government from leaders like Brissot in the first National Assembly in 1790 to Benjamin Constant in the Government of Louis XVIII after 1815. She recorded her observations in a subjective manner from the perspective of an evolving republican and advocate of civil liberty. Moreover, she also provided comments juxtaposed with observation of events throughout her texts using such "annotations" (a method noted by Jerome Mcgann in relation to her addition of sonnets as commentary to her translation of Bernadin de St. Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*) to express her views with regard to issues concerning Liberty in politics, women, and religion in a manner that was unusual in eighteenth century women's writing.

It was the perspective of a small minority of women that Williams shared. Also, she was commenting within the context of a minority of publicists of either sex who chose to convey and encourage thought about change in political systems in Europe and America. Williams provides an example of the kind of woman feared by people like Fénelon, and Burke--those who attempted to stir readers' emotions and intellect concerning laws, morals and revolutions. It is this characteristic of Williams's historiography that has also interested me and which underscores the kind of observation cited above from Scott. As the periodicals of the day noted, the type of writing and style Williams produced was not of the type usually provided to present a view of historical "fact."

Regarding the emotional dimension of women and subjectivity, Williams shared the assessment of Chamfort concerning their sensitivity by noting "*quelque part que les femmes ont dans la tête une fibre de moins que les hommes, et dans le cœur une fibre de plus*" [there is in the mind of a woman one fibre less than the men, and in the heart one fibre more] (*Souvenirs* 6). In her agreement that women possessed more ability to "feel" Williams acknowledged that "*ce principe où plutôt ce fait s'est montre même à mon insu dans toute ma carrière politique*" [this principle, or rather this fact, has always been evident, even unconsciously, in my political career] (6).

There is never an indication that she believed emotional involvement with situations to be necessarily a problem. It was "*un sentiment de profond sympathie*" [a profound sympathy] for the family of du Fossé that had drawn her into the career that she assumed, a political one, by which she could encourage an emotional interconnectedness between her readers and the effects of socio-political change. By so doing, the reality of such human involvement needed to address abuses, and while not based on the "profound investigation of the statesman" encouraged thought and action on the part of citizens who could eventually be in a position to influence such representatives. In other words, anyone sympathetic to others could involve themselves with the humanitarian concerns for the betterment of all citizens. Writing which sought after the "plaudits of philologists"(29) could scarcely be expected to affect more than a minority of readers.

In the preface of her translation of Bernadin de St. Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*, Williams indicates that when writing, she is " accustomed to follow the impulse of [her] feelings" (1795: iv). Yet in the preface of her novel *Julia*, she warns that when the "passions" are "disproved by reason and uncircumscribed by prudence, they involve even the virtuous in calamity" (1790: iii). I conclude from such statements made at very different experiential stages in her life that Williams believed in the need for the employment of that "extra fibre" of emotion by women, tempered by reason, to inject the reality of the human experience into their communication on the effects of political actions on citizens. I am further convinced of this when aware that, on occasions, by descriptions and anecdote, she sought to appeal directly to her readers' sympathy whether focusing on situations of joy or sorrow. This type of evidence, which supports the notion of "radical" sensibility,[17] also indicates the method that determined Williams's "subjective" style of historiography.

Williams's adherence to the political concept of Liberty was inspired and maintained by the emotional significance it had for her. When she acknowledged the naive hopes of representatives of "*les amis de la liberté, au commencement de la révolution*" [friends of liberty at the beginning of the revolution] (*Souvenirs 58),* she was acknowledging her own naiveté. She also stressed their "sublime sacrifices made in the common cause" (*Letters* 1792, ii: 202). Throughout her discourse, she continued to reflect the perspective of an immediate observer, expressing her comments through the filter of her own principles. Such commentary, as Scott noted, is important and has, until the end of the twentieth century, been treated with the kind of disdain evident in the eighteenth century periodical cited above which criticized the fact that Williams lacked evidence of "profound investigation" and "discussion."

In her choice of methods, Williams had another agenda than one of merely describing events she witnessed. It is evident from the fact that in the rest of her writing to 1827 she was intent on publicizing her political opinions, and using an emotive style to do so. She typifies the kind of female writer whose subjectivity was suspect in the eighteenth century. Michel Berault in *Words and Things* (1992), commenting on changes in methods of presenting discourse, observed that styles have created controversy in the later twentieth century. He identifies the recent feminist debate "on the masculine character of rationalism . . . the model of the rational, centred, purposive, subject of the Enlightenment theory" (207), and "the Enlightenment dualism in which the feminine or women are always cast as inferior to . . . men" (208).

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[17] This was a "freer and more generous ideal" as opposed to "conservative" sensibility that "revered feudal bonds of loyalty and hierarchical submission as providing a

I contend that by defying the traditional in women's writing, Williams provides an example of an eighteenth century commentator who attempts to force attention on the *actual* effect of the political on the social-domestic sphere, an effect which may only be appreciated when the dimension of popular sentiment and feelings of humanity are engaged. With a vision of a progressive political order influencing her perspective, Williams provided opinions that were supportive of civil libertarian theories, as will be evidenced in the following chapters. However, she could hardly determine that the response of her readers would be as committed or single-minded in *their* particular subjectivity as her own.

Berault notes that feminist cultural commentary and discussion has often tended to draw on the pleasures of fiction, the significance of the "meta-narrative and its appeal" (205). However he cautions "this is not to pose a crude antithesis between 'politics' and 'fiction', but is to remark on how helpful many have found it to use a metaphorical fictionalizing as a critical tool for unlocking the objectivist pretensions of things like rationality, the Enlightenment or even feminism" (205). Williams, whose discourse soared "to language of eloquence and pathos" (*Critical Review* 1792: 68), and contained many "engaging anecdotes" (*Monthly Review* 1796: 326), was criticized for the seeming romanticism in her writing. She herself acknowledges that life in

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habituated form for man's emotional needs" (Jones: 139).

France as she experienced it in 1790 to 1791, appeared to her "somewhat like living in a region of romance" (*Letters* 1792, II: 6). "We should perfectly well agree with her as she is used to such writing . . ." comments one reviewer condescendingly (*Gentleman's Magazine* Jan. 1790: 62). Yet, she reminds her readers that some of her narratives of the experiences of those caught up in the revolution may seem like excerpts from "a tale of fiction," but were not (*Letters* 1792, II: 156).

Her enthusiastic response to the reactions she observed may be explained by her delight in the hope that there might be a greater possibility for general happiness if the ideals of the early days of the revolution could be maintained. As a reviewer from *The Critical Review* noted, Williams saw

> The transactions of the common people, who are necessarily and with reason enthusiasts in favour of the revolution. They have escaped from the oppression and from taxes: they have recovered their liberty and secured the enjoyment of their property. In the higher ranks, she has seen those who are partial to change, those who have been relieved from distress in consequence of it, and those who have much to hope from the new arrangements. This accounts in a great measure for the favourable representations; nor are we disposed to deny, we in reality believe, that the nation in general has gained much. (1792: 66)

On a more pessimistic note that injected realism to counter Williams's early idealism, he continued: "[the French] have suffered more than they ought to have done; and from the misconduct of their new governors are likely to suffer still more in pursuit of their new idol" (66). Since a majority of the French was of the "common people," and had suffered long under feudal despotism, it may be deuced that the critic reflected the view of the elite in the hierarchical systems prevalent in Europe.

Williams always presented her observations and comments in a style that attempted to induce empathy. She attempted to be persuasive in defense of her opinions. By doing so, she did not provide the type of historicism that was acceptable then and which continued to be acknowledged as appropriate until the questions arising from post modern scholarship about degrees of credibility in “objective” and “subjective” discourse. By her choice of subject matter and style Williams focuses attention on areas of subjectivity which have created a sense of discomfort in historicism for centuries, but which is now being questioned. An example of this is evident in Selma Leydesdorff's plea for

> a historiography of that which is not immediately visible and, one step further. A historiography which traces what has been forgotten about women and what they themselves have repressed will have to reconsider the basis of its theories . . . We must . . . ask ourselves why so much about women has been forgotten, repressed or omitted. (*Current Issues* 1989: 19-20)

In 1992, Joan Scott commented on the problem created by images, stereotypes, and symbols that “have a complicated but not a direct relationship with reality. We must read them as messages whose meanings are not self-evident, but are there to be analyzed, interpreted, decoded in terms of the historical context in which they occur” (*Women's History as Women's Education* 38). Subjectivity in writing expressed in the manner Williams employs aids reclamation of certain commonalities comparable over time in emotional responses to political and social issues by both men and women.

Williams did not write historical “fact” and commentary in the style of her contemporary, the historian Catharine Macaulay, whose style according to Vivien Jones was “androgynous rather than feminine” since Macaulay believed such discourse should be “‘*manly*, noble, full of strength and majesty’”(1990: 101)]. Rather than a celebration of the feminine temperament, Williams's writing would then have exhibited an emulation of men rather than the discourse peculiarly of a woman, who despite the seriousness of her concerns, allows evidence of her emotional response, and her observations of it in others.

Throughout the following chapters, I have traced the theme of Liberty in the writings of Helen Maria Williams between 1781 and 1827. By her persistent reminder to her readers of the importance of the concept of liberty in politics and society, Williams provides an example of a publicist among those who sought to educate--using a variety of different styles within their discourse. Included in such publications were texts such as those of Joseph Priestley and William Godwin that presented reasoned "political discussions," of the type to "secure the frigid plaudits of [eighteenth century] philologists."[18] They both provided scholarly arguments to encourage consideration of their civil libertarian themes to be read by the minority of educated, primarily male readers. To appeal to those with less education and access to literature, or to be read to them by others were the writings of Thomas Paine whose *Rights of Man* was written in terminology aimed at the majority of the minimally educated. Appealing primarily to women were the writings of Williams, who indicated that her writings were not intended merely as memoirs or travelogues of the popular type.

Williams's commentaries are all the more unusual in providing a serious political theme and commitment with a prose style that acknowledged the need for the injection of sentiment and sensibility in discourse in order to plead the cause of liberty, the *cause* *humaine* (*Souvenirs* 7). Often in her prose, there is a sense that she would have preferred to express more in poetry which of all styles she preferred, and in several works, she does add poetic comment. A critique of Williams's first volume of *Letters* (1790), appearing in *The English Review*, alludes to the difference in style expected from male and female writers:

> The language may seem too bold and pointed from a female pen; but when women undertake to write on masculine subjects, and reason as Miss Williams does, we wish their language to be free from all female prettiness, and express with energy and perspicuity, the ideas they mean to convey. (*The English Review* xvii 61)

By 1792, a reviewer in the same periodical determined that her second volume, exhibiting "the ebullitions, however elegant, of an inflamed imagination," was not

> so much addressed to the sagacious politicians of the day, as to the more amiable, though perhaps less sagacious ones, we mean the politicians in petticoats. Its writer is a female democrate, and female democrates should be its readers. (57)

He further notes that her "warmth" and enthusiasm" about the "superior sensibility of the French to the tender sympathy" would be considered "unmanly" for an Englishman to express (59). If Williams had emulated the "masculine" style as did Catharine Macaulay, her discourse, rather than being a celebration of sensibility in temperament, would have displayed less evidence of emotional response, and her observations of it in others.

With this in mind, the words of Wilhelm von Humboldt, brother of Alexander for whom she did extensive translation work in the early nineteenth century, perhaps

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[18] Unlike Williams. (See page 29 above)

provide a reflection of the problem she experienced:

> Man thinks and lives within language alone - But he senses and knows that language is only a means to him, that there is an invisible realm outside it in which he seeks to feel at home . . . The most commonplace observation and the profoundest thought both lament the inadequacy of language . . . All higher forms of speech are a wrestling with this thought in which sometimes our power, sometimes our longing is keenly felt. (Falk 187)

Williams's discourse was suffused with the language of sensibility that accounted for its distinctive difference from the prose commentary of most men among her contemporaries in political commentary. For this reason it is relevant to conclude these introductory remarks with an observation from Jerome McGann, who is particularly concerned that the reading of eighteenth century poetry not be confined in "critical abstractions" which may reduce its significance. He observes:

> The internal conflicts of modernism, the many (celebrated or deplored) postmodernisms, and the "future" of poetic writing in which we might be interested: these subjects call us to return to the eighteenth century, and in particular to reconsider carefully the poetry of the "feeling heart," the *cœur sensible*. (*Poetics of Sensibility* 1996: 4)

In the following chapters I attempt to extend this to the importance of the "feeling heart" which Williams often reminds her readers is necessary to a better understanding of human progress, "to a better order of things."

CHAPTER II

In Search of "Enlightened Freedom"

> I ever witness these scenes of general felicity . . . indulging in the hope that a period is approaching . . . when the crooked subtleness of politics and the open violations of justice will alike pass away, and what has hitherto been considered as the fond speculation of the philosopher, the golden gleam of the moralist, will become historical fact . . .
>
> Helen Maria Williams *Letters from France* 1792: 76

> [Men] have long been ignorant, and have not yet attained sufficient knowledge. They have been condemned to darkness, and their eyes are dazzled by the light . . . But the genuine principle of enlightened freedom will soon be better comprehended. . . . The oppressions which mankind have suffered in every age, and almost in every country will lead them to form more perfect systems of legislation than if they had suffered less . . .
>
> Helen Maria Williams *Letters* 1792: 205

> To mark the present features of this revolution [the enlightened sentiments of masculine and improved philosophy] requires a mind not only unsophisticated by old prejudice . . . but an amelioration of temper, produced by the exercise of the most enlarged principles of humanity.
>
> Mary Wollstonecraft *An Historical and Moral View* 1794

Although Helen Maria Williams began her public writing career in England in 1781, the majority of her publications were written in France commenting on the various stages and effects in the process of the re-conceptualization of French politics between 1790 and 1827. Remarks like those cited at the beginning of this chapter taken from the second volume of her *Letters from France* (1792), are indicative of her subscription to the ideals of "enlightened freedom," and "the exercise of the most enlarged principles of humanity" acknowledged by her friend Mary Wollstonecraft,[19] whose expressions of radical thought and experience were probably closer to those of Williams than of any other late eighteenth century radical commentator. Unlike Wollstonecraft, whose death in 1797 curtailed her further publication of reformist rhetoric, Williams's continuation for another thirty years allowed her to remain one of the few women writers to trace the course of the early revolutionary ideals of 1789 into the nineteenth century.

In expressing her hope that "the genuine principle of enlightened freedom will soon be better comprehended and may perhaps, at no distant period, be adopted by all the states of Europe" (*Letters* 1792, II: 205) through the acquisition of "sufficient knowledge," (204) Williams reveals a focus that remained a concern throughout her lifetime. In her last publication, she acknowledged the importance of knowledge that "*élèvent et agrandissent l'âme*" [elevates and enlarges the soul], and the "*droit sacré être libre*" [the sacred right to be free] (*Souvenirs* 159). Despite her experiences of anarchy and further despotism in France, Williams continued to "espouse liberal and humanitarian principles in confronting the sinister forces of both political and religious despotism" (Wolder 1996: 7). Wolder asserts that such principles determined Rousseau's role in the revolution that followed his death, and also shaped the beginning of a movement which eventually led to increased liberalism in European politics.

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[19] Mary Wollstonecraft spent the years 1792 to 1794 in France. Her *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* e (1794) appeared in a single edition during her lifetime.

In the following chapters, my intent is to trace the origins and influences affecting Williams's principles, and her attempts to communicate them. Williams emerged from an eighteenth century milieu which, while witnessing significant increase in the number of women novelists, still perceived that for

> women to write and publish at all was by definition a transgressive and potentially liberating act, a penetration of the forbidden public sphere, and the virulence with which fiction was attacked as a corrupting 'female' genre is telling evidence of its disruptive potential. (Jones 12)

Although she produced one novel, Williams's career in politics was primarily that of a commentator from within the context of shifts in several cultural paradigms. The particular method by which she conveyed her impressions and ideals was part of another change affecting the character of women's writing beyond the eighteenth century. Questions that shaped the themes addressed by my research concern the cultural forces that affected the intellectual and emotional evolution of several facets of Williams's voice. She communicates through the filter of several cultures: Enlightenment, Radical Reform, Rational Dissent, and Sensibility.

Enlightenment thinking, originating in the seventeenth century encouraged skepticism towards mainstream traditional values, invoking a dependence on the primacy of a rational system, humanitarianism, and the notion of human perfectibility. Evolving from this was a minority culture of radical reform that, by agitating for increased civil liberty, had the potential to generate revolution in political systems as evidenced by France and America in the late 1700s. The Culture of Sensibility (Frye 1956), emphasizing feelings of empathy and benevolence, became increasingly evident in the concerns which characterized the "sensationalist theories" of Locke, and Hume, and the aesthetics of feeling suffusing later eighteenth century poetry and novels. Raised in Rational Dissent, Williams was exposed to values, which, while asserting the importance of reason, acknowledged various forms of deism. Joseph Priestley, a leading exponent of the Unitarian Presbyterianism influencing her youth, believed that education should teach "the most liberal principles of religion and politics" (*Proper Objects of Education* 1791: 425).

It is the intent of this study to examine the development of Williams as a woman who represented Rational Dissenting thought in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She added her voice to the "tradition of native British radicalism" by providing a "literature which ensured the transmission of ideas and the accumulation of a body of radical thinking which each generation could savour and to which it could add new insights" (Royle and Walvin 181). In the last decade, research[20] has revealed that beginning at the end of the eighteenth century, a more numerous group of middle and working class women in Britain were involved in attempting to promote parliamentary reform than previously determined.

In the following chapters I contend that Williams communicated her opinions about the concept of "Liberty" as it was perceived by other radical and civil libertarian reformers in the late 1700s. From within the context of poems and political commentaries, and in the rhetoric of "radical" sensibility, her discourse transmitted an informal education by conveying the problems in a style that had more popular appeal than the reasoned arguments of philosophical treatises about the problems and hopes of those who believed in progressively more liberal government systems. Her contribution is unusual and important since she projected most of her comments on social and political issues through the intimate epistolary style which, when used by women, was primarily to produce romantic fiction. Focusing on attempts at political reform and their consequences through the medium of the emotive style of sensibility in the letter format, she created a most provocative way of conveying issues considered by most of her contemporaries to be primarily the concern of men. Indeed, Mary Favret[21] has identified its use by men advocating political change. As an author of radical rhetoric, Williams used the epistolary style in order to reach women used to reading romantic fiction presented in letter format, as well as men who appreciated more evidence of sentiment in philosophical argument.

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[20] *Political Women*. Ed. Ruth an Edmund Frow. London: Winchester Press, 1989.

An Author's Voice

In *Souvenirs* (1827) Williams acknowledged a career in politics rather than one as a historian since she perceived herself to be incapable of distancing her feelings and recording her experiences in an "objective" manner. Williams's concern remains a contentious issue. In "Historiography, Objectivity and the Case of the Abusive Widow," Bonnie Smith questions the absorption of historians in the issue of objectivity.

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[21] *Romantic Correspondence* 1993.

She notes that "since the nineteenth century, the profession of history has taken pride in its ability to purge itself of biases arising from class, gender, race, and politics; and these claims continue to be made and disputed" (*Feminism* 1996: 547). Citing Peter Novick's reworking of the "myth of objectivity" she acknowledges that "with each new generation, the discourse of objectivity is revitalized" (547).

Since little has yet been revealed of Williams through personal letters and papers, it is necessary to rely primarily on inferences from her authorship as a guide to her voice, and intentions. As noted at the beginning of this section, she exposed her subjectivity,[22] which enabled her to empathize with the predominantly voiceless oppressed. Both for them and to them she spoke, injecting reality into abstractions of political theory. Williams's contemporary, Catharine Macaulay, believed that historical writing should be modeled after the mode determined by men. Williams avoided the issue by declaring her writing outside the province of the historian. It is obvious that she believed that "subjectivity" was relevant when commenting on events and opinions that shaped history.

Revisiting Williams's Voice

It was not until 1930 that Lionel Woodward began the process of reclaiming Williams from more than a century of obscurity to which she had been consigned by the general neglect of women who had once established themselves in print. Towards the end of the century, Gary Kelly has continued the process of redressing the unfavorable press of counter-revolutionary and Romantic rhetoric in the early nineteenth century that had aided the established indifference to Williams's life and work. He began the process of refocusing attention on her contribution to radical women's voices. Kelly has noted when ascribing to her the feminizing of the French Revolution, that a long neglect of her caused "Willams's work [to be] . . . marginalized, trivialized and excluded from the history and historiography it had helped to make" (1993: 233). More than sixty years earlier, Woodward expressed his astonishment that she had ever been forgotten by researchers in history and literature (1930: 267).

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[22] She asserts "*J'espere avoir prouvé que mes principes (et les principes politiques d'une femme dérivent toujours de ses sentimens) ont toujours penché du côte du parti opprimé*" [I hope to prove that my principles (and the political principles of a woman are always derived from her feelings) are always inclined to support the oppressed group] *Souvenirs* 199.

During the last decade, a variety of perspectives on different aspects of Williams's life and work have appeared. Recent studies accord divergent assessments to her and reflect the type of positive and negative criticism which was also apparent, for a variety of other reasons, among her contemporaries. Williams will be presented as an example of a woman who, although denied access to the formal education available to men, had the courage to inject her voice into the primarily male realm of published views on controversial political and social issues concerning Europe and America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Apart from the problems created by adverse public reaction to her publications about the various stages of political revolution in France from 1790 to 1827, the radical views of Williams, her method of projecting herself, and her subjection to defamation[23] by contemporaries all detracted from the possibility of her contribution receiving the acknowledgment it deserved. However, she provides an example to others of achievements possible with determination and adherence to principles, despite limited educational opportunities, and traditional societal values that generally underestimated a woman's ability to contribute anything worthwhile beyond the domestic sphere.

In the fulfillment of her desire to inform others about the need to address government abuse of power, and its effect on politically unenlightened citizenry, Williams's voice entered a destabilizing dialogue with the traditional role assigned to women in mainstream ideology. Her ambition and methods of presenting material placed her in the context of a variety of male-dominated domains rarely entered by women presuming to publish radical views on political, social, literary, and religious issues.[24] Joan Wallach Scott observed in 1996:

> Feminists have long criticized traditional accounts of the past for excluding women . . . They have offered critical analyses of the reasons for women's exclusion. They have argued that attention to women would not only provide new information, but also expose the limits of histories written only from the perspective of men. And they have documented the subtle and not so subtle obstacles that prevented women from writing history. (*Feminism* 12)

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[23] Those who were responsible for the denigration of certain women's writing included female intellectuals such as Hannah More, who supported the hierarchical ordering of society, and disapproved of women's involvement in politics. Also active in this process of defamation was the Anti-Jacobin Press after 1792, and spokespeople for the Counter-revolutionary and Romantic movements after 1800.

[24] The limited nature of this is evident in the excessive reliance--until recently--on the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft to provide an example of the perspectives of radical eighteenth century thought and response in women.

I have chosen to include references to most of Williams's written expression. Without an awareness of the extent of Williams's discourse, and of the social and political influences affecting her, it is impossible to assess her significance. If the principles that framed her intellectual and emotional response are not acknowledged, she remains limited to general view. An example of the manner in which underestimation of her has recently occurred may be found in an article that refers to her as one of the "minor sentimental novelists" whose work was "burlesqued" by Jane Austen (Smith *English Language Notes* Sept. 1992). There is truth in ascribing to her a minor novelist status when one considers her only novel, *Julia*, (1790) was positioned in the genre of sentimental fiction of the eighteenth century. However, if these comments and her characterization as a minor novelist were to be read in isolation from the rest of her work and biography, she would remain a shadowy prop to the canon, which acknowledges her contemporary, Austen, as a major writer.

My use of a partial biographical framework was also influenced by my reading of William Epstein's assessment of biography as a "tool for social change" (1991: 3). He encourages a combative stance for postmodern biographers by which they become "cultural guerillas" engaged in sabotaging "generic practices of biographical recognition." The essays in *Contesting the Subject, Essays in Postmodern Theory and Practice in Biography* are unified in their contention that the vital role of biography is to provide an important "arena of dispute," and its need to revise what has previously been neglected or taken for granted. I found this an appealing concept since I maintain that Williams epitomizes a cultural reformer, and was neglected. In both the public and private sphere, she acted contrary to a variety of norms established not only for females, but also for males. Williams's life demonstrates what is possible when a woman has the courage to find ways of living in accord with her conscience despite problems created by differing social expectations of her day. She displays a persistence made possible because her actions and involvement accorded with a deeply ingrained political, literary, and religious conscience. Williams's confidence in the moral rightness of the causes in which she participated was maintained with a fervor usually reserved for metaphysical and theological speculation. Her thoughts and actions were motivated by what appears to have been her acknowledgement of the political cultural determiners of mid-late eighteenth century concepts of Sensibility and Liberty. These involved an aspect of the "radical" culture of Sensibility[25] which emphasized social empathy and compassion beyond domestic confines, and a form of liberty of conscience and expression endorsed by the language of Rational Dissent, and later radical liberal theory.

Origins of Radical Thought

Williams's intellect was informed from childhood by the visionary zeal of radical political and social reformers whom she respected and emulated within the confines of her female status. She occasionally decries the limitations of women, and notes their dependence resulting from a contemporary perception of men's superiority, and their suffering during times of civil violence. However, she does not focus on her own limitations, but rather on notions of progress towards a more evolved state of personal and civil rights as her mentors in Rational Dissent, with their attachment to the optimistic rhetoric of Enlightenment philosophy, would have encouraged in her youth. Throughout her life, those who influenced the evolution of Williams's thought were among the foremost male and female intellectuals and political activists of her day, not only in her native Britain, but also in France, the country whose concerns she adopted in her late twenties.

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[25] Chris Jones, critical of modern scholarship for trying to impose a unitary interpretation, observes: "Sensibility was clearly not a uniform or unitary concept when it could be both championed and attacked from so many points of view" (*Radical Sensibility* 1993: 4).

Raised in the climate of religious Dissent, she associated with professional British intellectuals like Andrew Kippis, Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft who represented Radical and/or Rational Dissenting thought. Such reform-minded philosophers engaged in the cultural revolution of the mid to late eighteenth century with the intention of reducing dependency on the hierarchical structure determined by inherited political control of the aristocracy, and that of legislated adherence to the dogma of the Establishment Anglican church. They advocated increased political representation, and freedom of conscience in religious matters. In writing accounts concerning attempts at political and social reform, Williams was a commentator at a time when, "for many . . . the existing social and political system had exhausted its legitimacy and seemed to be held together merely by force - and solely to serve a privileged and rapacious minority" (Claeys 1994 xiii)

While adding her voice to those of other reformers among radical publicists, Williams maneuvered within the circumscribed means at her disposal to communicate the need for radical change in attitudes, in the organization of civil society. She attempted to convey a vision of a morally responsible and reasoned form of liberty (*Souvenirs* 200) within a more evolved humanity. William consistently asserted the importance of reasoned action tempered by humanitarian concern, and the importance of liberty as may be glimpsed from the following observations taken from the beginning and end of her writing career:

> When shall reason's intellectual ray
> Shed o'er the moral world more perfect day?
> When shall the gloomy world appear no more
> A waste, where desolating tempests roar? (1786: 20)

> *Enfin, il faut admettre . . . que la marche des peuples modernes se dirige vers la liberté et par conséquent vers le bonheur* . . . (1827: 200). [Eventually it will be necessary to acknowledge that people will move towards liberty, and consequently towards happiness]

With reference to her persistence concerning liberty, Chris Jones observes that Williams is a "good example of radical sensibility under stress since she preserved her allegiance to the principles of the Revolution and perpetually looked for their implementation in society" (Jones 159). He observes that in her writing, "radical sensibility becomes a combative, critical force, using the methods of reason as well as the emotions to attack the national images revered by conservative sensibility" (159). The increasingly egalitarian proposals in the Declaration of the Chamber of Representatives following the 1815 accession of Louis XVIII echoed those evident in the Constitution of 1790, and further convinced her of the appropriateness of her optimism.

Acquiring an Author's Voice

Her first male mentor, Andrew Kippis encouraged Williams's language of sensibility, when he aided the publication of her first poem, *Edwin and Eltruda* in 1782. An anti-war poem, it was the beginning of her commentary in poetry and prose on such injustices as war, slavery, and despotism. Since she became a radical publicist who conveyed her observations and opinions with the obvious intent of influencing the thoughts of others, the sources determining her principles and the fact that she provided informal education on controversial contemporary political issues are an important component of this study.

Williams emerged from the influence of mentors, family, and friends who had been shaped by Enlightenment philosophy. The Rational Dissenting intellectuals who influenced her early education mirrored the skepticism of Enlightenment culture, and subscribed to Descartes' view that doubt was the beginning of knowledge. In their academies all knowledge was debated. According to Lincoln the "distinguishing sign" of Rational Dissenters "was the exercise of the natural right of freedom of inquiry, and a frequent characteristic was theological heresy" (Lincoln 30). However, this did not stretch into atheism. Isaac Watts noted that "God and religion may be better known, and clearer ideas may be obtained from the amazing wisdom of our Creator . . . by the rational learning and the knowledge of nature that is now so much in vogue"

(*Discourses* 380). Joseph Priestley, one of the leading intellectuals among them observed that "everything is made subservient to the study of theology" (77). However, since he believed that free inquiry should also be applied to religion, he commented in a mood illustrative of what most of his contemporaries would have thought the most extreme form of Enlightenment belief that all knowledge should be put to the test of reason:

> But should free inquiry lead to the destruction of Christianity itself it ought not, on that account, to be discontinued; for we can only wish for the prevalence of Christianity on the supposition of its being true; and if it fall before the influence of free inquiry, it can only do so in consequence of its not being true. (*Essay* xxiv)

The theories of John Locke were highly regarded by the Rational Dissenters, and his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, was considered "the bible of dissenting faith" (Lincoln 82). Williams, always proud of her British heritage and an admirer of Locke and other "freedom fighters" of the previous century, was of the view that "[s]urely that nation which produced the writings of Milton and Locke, which gave birth to Sidney[26] and Hambden (sic) in ages when the rest of Europe were slaves, has a claim to the everlasting gratitude and admiration of mankind" (*Letters* 1792: 114-5). She perceived the connection between the British philosophers of the Enlightenment and the libertarian philosophies evolving in France and perhaps superseding the British reformers noting: "In this enlightened period of the world more perfect systems may perhaps be found than England can boast" (115). However, if this results, "[i]f those nations now find the track it is by *pursuing the track* which England first explored"[27] (116).

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[26] Both Locke and Sidney wrote "sweeping defences of popular sovereignty, but neither saw fit to publish" in response to the Exclusion crisis in 1679 (Morgan 104).

With regard to pedagogical issues, Locke believed that man is "entirely what he is made by education" (Boyd 288). In eighteenth century France, La Chalatois [1701-1788] argued for the need for a more utilitarian form of public education to take the place of that provided primarily under the influence of Jesuits. He criticized them for not preparing students to be citizens of the state since they were more concerned with religious issues and dogma. Williams was to note that a large majority of the people could not read and that the only books available were on religious matters, and served to reinforce obedience to the status quo (*Souvenirs* 13). Her comments about Mirabeau and Condorcet's "sublime" plans for a French public education in 1792 (1792: 117) are indicative of her perspective on the importance of education. She optimistically noted that we "feel the blessings of enlightened freedom await (the French), and we rejoice that a suitable education will qualify them to enjoy their distinguished lot" (*Letters* 1792: 119).

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[27] Williams was a Whig of the type who perceived Algernon Sidney to have been a martyr after he was executed for assigning the "origin and limitation of government to the people" (104). He was a precursor of those like her Rational Dissenting associates who supported the right of the people as indicated by Locke to "depose a king, or any other ruler who betrays his trust . . ." (105)

Determining her Educational Focus

Williams's early experiences of education were determined by her mother [28] and a leading intellectual among Rational Dissenters, Andrew Kippis, classical and philological tutor at the Coward and Hackney Dissenting academies, and a fellow of the Royal Society. She would have absorbed Lockean notions "which traced back knowledge to two sources: to the materials received passively through the senses, and to the mind's own activity in working on these materials through the several operations summarily described as reflections"(Boyd 287). Williams's intellect evolved within Enlightenment cultural influences in Britain through the dissemination of philosophies of John Locke, David Hartley [1705-57], David Hume [1711-1776], and Joseph Priestley [1733-1804]. Consequently, she would have had a predisposition to acknowledge the views of the French *philosophes*, who were influenced by their English counterparts--especially given her acknowledgement of Britain as the original motivating force towards government reform, and freedom of conscience and expression in the revolutionary movements in previous centuries. When writing about the dissemination of ideas in France, Williams notes that the theories of Rousseau [1712-78], Etienne Condillac [1715-1780], Claude-Adrien Helvétius [1715-1771], and Marie-Jean Condorcet [1743-1794] were discussed in the salons (*Souvenirs*). Each brought a different facet to the theories of education early in the Revolution, and doubtless affected her own thinking as comments which punctuate her discourse indicate. Condillac and Helvétius stressed that education depended more on the social environment than originally thought, that society could determine the principles of the next generation through education, and that there existed a common capacity to learn. Together with these educators, Williams was familiar with Rousseau's ideas on education.

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[28] The only direct evidence of this is a comment by Andrew Kippis in the Preface of Williams's first published poem, *Edwin and Eltruda:* "the only instruction which Helen received was that given by her virtuous, amiable and sensible mother."

Williams had the advantage of being educated among people who believed that a woman should be encouraged to acquire knowledge and to publish her views. This is evident in Kippis's encouragement of her early anti-war publications. Her response to the knowledge and philosophies she absorbed was to attempt to inform and influence others through publications of poetry and prose. Her friend Mary Wollstonecraft was not so fortunate in her childhood. Raised in an abusive and intellectually sterile home environment, it was only when she gravitated to the group of Rational Dissenters around Richard Price in Newington Green that she found intellectual encouragement. Rational Dissenters like Andrew Kippis, Philip Furneaux, Joseph Priestley, and David Williams believed that "Education was a branch of Civil Liberty which ought by no means to be surrendered to the magistrate" (Priestley[29] *First Principles of Government* 54). Kippis, who was a mentor to both Williams and Godwin, believed it to be the greatest trust that people could ever be given.

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[29] Priestley was "an outspoken foe of public education. His insistence that the state play no role in such matters repudiated both past practice . . . and contemporary arguments put forward by his reformer friends, Paine and Wollstonecraft" (Kramnick 1990: 87).

Despite evidence of extensive reading and literary ability, Williams's education remained informal, since she could not enter the Dissenting academies, which were confined to males. Such educational practice was not unusual for the times. In the eighteenth century there was a proliferation of boarding schools which girls could attend. These schools were encouraged by middle class desires to equip their daughters with skills that might improve their marriage prospects. For the working classes, increased humanitarian concern led to the development of charity schools. However, from the culture of Dissent, Williams would not have had access to these, nor would they have seemed suitable given the more rigorous questioning attitude and expectations the Dissenters had towards learning. Chapter III of this study provides evidence of certain aspects of Dissenting education as they were applied by the type of intellectuals with whom Williams associated.

There is evidence from allusions throughout her work that Williams was widely read in literature and politics, and she developed a high degree of confidence and interest in discussing and publicizing her thoughts throughout her relatively long life.[30] In her political commentaries, poems, and translations, she attempts to convey opinions about issues she believed vital to the successful implementation of a more liberal government principles, and provides information about their progress in both French and Swiss politics.

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[30] Williams was sixty-six when she died in Paris, December 1827.

Viewing Williams's Response

One of her few direct comments regarding the state of education in France illustrates her concern that political and social theory often remained abstractions not understandable to the majority of citizens. She lamented the lack of a French national system noting: "*En général l'éducation de la nation restait entièrement à faire, et les écrits philosophiques, qui s'étaient d'alleurs trop occupés de théories et pas assez de pratique, n'avaient pas pénétré les masses.*" [Generally national education remained to be done, and the writings of the philosophers, which are more occupied with theory than practice, have not penetrated the masses] (*Souvenirs* 1827).

Beyond the wish to publish, and the practical rewards of it, Williams pursued her writing career for the purpose of communicating to the reading public the importance of being knowledgeable about certain political concepts--especially that of Liberty--their application, and the social consequences of apathy about such issues within potentially or existent despotic systems of government. It is anticipated that this study will reveal that as a product of a social and intellectual milieu of Rational Dissent, Williams remained enthusiastically involved in pursuing educational ends and reforming means to help effect the evolution of a population that could participate in, and take increased responsibility for, the implementation of a more enlightened, civil society.

In Williams's discourse, whether on the state of politics and society of England, France, or Switzerland, she did not confine herself to describing events, places, and people. The fact that she included her assessments of these indicates that she intended not only to transmit details of events and the people involved as she observed them, but also to convey her perspective on more ideal forms of government and the type of citizens who would sustain them. She also drew attention to such questions as to why they were not in place, how they might be arrived at, why they should be a prime consideration for any citizen, and the devastating consequences if progress towards more humanitarian political and social organizations were to be ignored. She identified as one of the main causes of despotism and its consequent erosion of liberty, the lack of majority education in Europe and greeted with delight the intent of the First National Assembly to institute a plan for public education (*Letters* 1792: 117).

To understand her perception of liberty as it emerges from her education, and pervades her commentaries on contemporary events and their consequences, I thought it necessary to identify sources, which elaborate on the concept as it was understood by libertarian sympathizers and others in the eighteenth century. It was a contentious issue and the subject of intense debate and writing before and after the independence of the American colonies in 1776. Radicals like Catharine Macaulay Graham and Richard Price, who appealed to their readers to keep in mind the perceived gains with regard to representative government after the "Glorious" Revolution of 1688 in England, were deeply committed to prompting their readers to remember the need to monitor government (Price *Observations* 5). Williams was convinced of the need for the type of liberty which could allow a more participating and responsible citizenry like that intended by the new American constitution. She observed that Brissot's stay in America in 1788 had caused him to think that "*la nation française était capable d'une pareille organisation politique*" [the French nation was capable of a parallel political organization] (*Souvenirs* 22).

Since she did not write political treatises or historical assessments like Macaulay, or Godwin, nowhere in her writing does Williams explain clearly the theory of civil liberty she cherished. Williams was not intent on conveying or discussing political theory, but on encouraging awareness and participation through opinions expressed from the viewpoint of a woman observing the effects of both its limitations and its excesses. However, an understanding of the concept as it was viewed by certain eighteenth century exponents of it is crucial to an understanding of Williams's intent in her informal instruction of the reading public. I have chosen to highlight the concept as assessed by Richard Price in *Observations on Civil Liberty* [1775], and perspectives appearing in *Cato's Letters* [1755][31] as typical of the type of views which prevailed among the radical intellectuals who influenced Williams's early life, and determined the radical nature of her interest and publications in England and France.

Williams as a "Preacher of Liberty"

When he visited Williams in 1814, the diarist, Henry Crabb Robinson commented that he had once read her commentaries with pleasure when she had been a

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[31] When reflecting on the events preceding American Independence, John Adams commented that in the early 1770s "*Cato's Letters* and the *Independent Whig*, and all the writings of Trenchard and Gordon, Mrs. Macaulay's *History*, Burgh's Political *Disquisitions* . . . all the writings relative to the revolutions in England became fashionable reading" (Jacobson 1965 xvii). Clinton Rossiter has observed that "No one can spend time [on the literature of colonial America] without realizing that *Cato's Letters*, rather than Locke's *Civil Government* was the most popular . . . esteemed source of political ideas in the colonial period." Williams's comments suggest she was familiar with this literature.

"preacher of liberty" in the early days of the Revolution (*Journal* 14th September 1814). Since she refers to liberty throughout her writings between 1790 to 1827, even terming it her "*culte*," her "*idole*," Robinson's phrase is a fitting description of her. One of those within the group who influenced her early education was Robert Hall, a Dissenting associate of Andrew Kippis. In 1791 Hall made reference to the importance of Liberty in his treatise *Christianity Considered with the Love of Freedom*. When citing Hall's opinions, Anthony Lincoln adds an assessment indicating the political attitude within the circle of Rational Dissent:

> Liberty is a uniform principal in all spheres. The nature of freedom should be an object of study among Christians, because it is through a just appreciation of it alone that liberty of conscience and elasticity of enquiry, so essential to the truly Christian life can be enjoyed. Religious freedom is one of the prerogatives of a free state, and on this account Hall would have dissenting ministers "well-skilled in freedom," because all politics have a simple and complex aspect--according to whether they are measured by principle or expediency, and while a just appreciation of the second entails a statesman's training, the first can be readily evaluated. (Lincoln 20-21)

The skepticism encouraged by the Rational Dissenters in their Academies was intended to create in the students an awareness that their faith should be based on reason, and that none should fear to analyze its credibility. Such teaching provoked discussion and a search after truth in debates and close scrutiny of texts that formed the bases of study. Unconsidered acceptance of dogma and superstition was discouraged. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, all subjects were submitted to the test of reason. The same reasoning was applied to the issue of freedom of religious conscience.

The theme of Liberty, with its implication for intellectual freedom of expression and criticism of existing government policies, permeates Williams's writing. In her early poetry she criticized oppression in war, and the misery of slavery, and in eyewitness accounts of her own experiences and those of others caught up in the diverse stages of the revolution in French government from 1790 to 1819, she continues the libertarian theme. Even when disillusioned by the failure of her naïve hope that there might be the dawning of a new age of civil liberty after each stage of change in the French "experiment" (*Letters* 1790: 136), she blames the lack of its success on the abuse of power by the "ignorant and unenlightened" (*Letters* 1796: 12).

After her initial stay in France during which she witnessed the anniversary of the Federation in 1790, Williams returned to England. However, she crossed back to France in July 1791, and by late 1791, she was "*en plein monde girondin*" [in the midst of the Girondin world) (Woodward 47). She made the acquaintance of other Girondins such as Bancal d'Issarts, Brissot, Vernigaud, Guadet, Buzot, all of whom were to die during the regime of Robespierre. On her first visit, Williams had become acquainted with Marie-Jeanne Roland, whose salon hosted many of those who wrote the first French Constitution. However, like her friends among those who formed the leadership in the first French Constitution, she was naive about human nature and overly optimistic about the ease with which reforms could be accomplished.

Williams's optimism about the French Revolution was informed by a broader idealistic vision later suggested by her references to liberty and humanitarianism in *Souvenirs*. An example of the recognition of this is evident in a gift to her of a poem in

1793. From a close acquaintance,[32] who provided her with his own experience of the curtailment of freedom in a *maison d'arrêt* during the Reign of Terror came an observation that she perceived to be a compliment:

Vous,qui des bords de la Tamise
Delaissant les brouillards épais
Au millieu du peuple français
Cherchates la terre promise;

Vous, qui carressâtes long-temps
Cette illusion delectable,
Comme s'amusent les enfants
Des rêves brillans de la fable[33]

The "promised land" to which he alludes was doubtless one of liberty of conscience and freedom of expression, a hope shared by all her radical associates. In his poem, he captures one of the main reasons motivating Williams's departure from England, and the "dream,"[34] illusory or not--clearly referred to in her 1815 commentary--became a motivating factor behind her contribution to radical political comment.

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[32] Marron, the Protestant minister of the church she attended in Paris from1790.

[33] "You, who from the banks of the Thames / Abandoning the thick fog / Searched for the promised land / Among the French people / You, who long nurtured / This delectable illusion / As children amuse themselves / By bright dreams from a story." Qtd. by Williams in *Letters Containing Sketches of the Politics of France* (1796: 118).

[34] Williams also reflected on the enthusiasm of her early days in French in *Souvenirs* : "*J'avais alors l'esprit rempli rêves d'un novel âge d'or, et le cœur toute occupé d'espoir de voir redresser tous les torts et protéger toute les innocence. Je m'étais bercée de si beaux rêves!*" [I was then filled with the dream of a new golden age, and my heart was occupied with hopes of seeing a redress of all injustices, and protection of the innocents. I indulged such beautiful dreams] (11).

Leaving England in 1790 with the intent to experience and write about the first year of the French Revolution, Williams evidently carried with her a dream, a "delectable illusion," of a more ideal political and social order. This may be compared to the view of Rousseau in his essay, *A Lasting Peace* (1756). He supports the Abbé de St. Pierre in his "illusions" about a federation of Europe, which he assesses in the essay. In evaluating the scheme for a lasting peace suggested by St. Pierre at the turn of the eighteenth century, Rousseau comments in the first part his essay *A Lasting Peace through the Federation of Europe*.

> Who would not prefer the illusion of a generous spirit, which overleaps all obstacles, to dry, repulsive reason whose indifference to the welfare of mankind is ever the chief obstacle to all schemes of its attainment? (36)

When Williams projected notions that seemed idealistic, she was usually adversely criticized as a sentimental female who was not considered to have a man's understanding or right to involvement in politics. However, this parallel with Rousseau's thought suggests that her "illusions" about Liberty were perhaps no less acceptable to influential men among the radical reformers, and are not necessarily the result of sentiment accompanied by ignorance.

The "illusion," the "promised land" [a phrase she used with the same connotation in *Souvenirs* over thirty years later], is a reference to the kind of universal liberty alluded to by a close friend in the final letter to her in the 1793 *Letters from France*. Together with her awareness of the thoughts of John Locke, Joseph Priestley, Tom Paine, Rousseau *et al.* it is evident from comments, and observations by others concerning her associations, that Williams daily interacted and corresponded with those who shared such views. Assessments in the following chapters will provide evidence that she drew attention to the concept of Liberty throughout her work. It may be deduced that her emotional reaction to it was similar to that detailed in the masculine expression evident in letters added to hers in Volume IV of *Letters from France* written in 1793. The identity of the writer of several of the letters remains open. The final letter provides an assessment of the Revolution, Liberty and responses to Edmund Burke's *Reflections* on the French revolution published in December 1790. Another written in May 1793, concludes idealistically about a time when:

> Equal laws, wise instruction, rational faith, and virtuous conduct constitute order and happiness, all mankind will become worshippers in the Temple of Liberty, whose corners will extend to the farthest ends of the earth and whose arch will be the vault of heaven. (IV 154)

Throughout her writing Williams alludes to the importance of the concept of Liberty in political theory influenced by the milieu of Rational Dissent in which she was raised. Her formative years were imbued by the religious and political principles of leading intellectual spokesmen for Dissent like Andrew Kippis, Richard Price, and Joseph Priestley whose liberal writings particularly addressed the need for freedom of conscience in all matters, and an avoidance of servitude.[35] In *Souvenirs*, which presents a defense of her political career, she clearly indicates their influence when she identifies the issues that determined the course of her life and work in the observation that:

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[35] Argued by Price in *Observations* (4).

> *rien n'a été plus constant que les opinions de mon propre cœur, si fidélité inébranable à la cause de l'espèce humaine, ou,en d'autres termes, à la cause de l'espèce humaine. Entraînée dès ma jeunesse au milieu des grands événement de la révolution française, ses principes sacrés devinrent mon culte et mon idole.*[36]

Another concept, which influenced her optimistic attitude about the possibility of increased civil liberty, was the notion of the perfectibility of man. Williams doubtless concurred with her reform–minded friends that "[to] forbid under the pains and penalties of reproach, all attempts of the human mind to advance to a greater perfection, seems to be proscribing every art and science" (Price *Observations* 18, 109). Such thoughts were common among British intellectuals of the Enlightenment culture, and to the French *philosophes* whose thoughts paralleled theirs on this issue. Williams also anticipated the development of a more perfect system of legislation (1792:115).

Expressing awareness of the connection between misery and tyranny, she records the hope that her principles had always tended to support the oppressed group (*Souvenirs* 199). Her observations show her acknowledgement of sentiments expressed by Joseph Priestley, a close friend of her mentor, Andrew Kippis, who observed in *First Principles of Government:*

> The generality of government have hitherto been little more than the combination of the few against the many, and to the mean passions and to the low cunning of those few have the great interests of mankind been too long sacrificed. (54)

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[36] . . . nothing has been more constant in my heart-felt opinions . . . faithful to the cause of humanity. Drawn from my youth into the midst of the great events of the French Revolution, its sacred principles became my creed and my idol (*Souvenirs* 3).

Henry Crabb Robinson provides proof that in the years after the height of her enthusiasm, she did not change in her ideals. Writing in October 1814, he comments: "I have been pleased to find Miss Williams retain her original love of liberty" (Qtd. in Woodward 259).

Williams published one more volume of letters tracing Napoleon's return from exile on Elba in 1815 and the Bourbon Restoration which followed in the same year. It contains details which further clarify her thoughts on the issue of liberty and her "dream" (5). Her comments that during her residence in Paris she had "witnessed all the successive stages of its revolutions, . . . [and so long] had marked the list of its remembrances, its calamities, its triumphs, and its crimes" (*Narrative* 3) indicate her desire to remind her readers of her role in communicating the fact of the unusual consistency with which she had recorded events--and that she remained to continue the story. In acknowledgement of her admiration for the French revolution and for Bonaparte, she excuses her "youthful imagination" to which "the day-star of liberty seemed to rise on the vine-covered hills of France, only to shed benedictions on humanity" (6). She recalls her dreams "of equal rights, a golden age, in which all who lived would be happy" and admits to witnessing "this star of liberty set in blood" (5). However, she reminds her readers, in her characteristically intimate way, in her first letter (April 1815):"You . . . are not of the number of those who deny that liberty was formed to bless and dignify mankind, because she has fallen on 'evil days and evil tongues'" (5).

As a further indication that her focus had remained constant, and her hopes for the future intact, she concludes her final letter with the hope that "the long profaned but sacred name of liberty will become the order of the day in the nineteenth century" (225). As noted by Robinson, Williams remained faithful to her original principles. She writes of her love for the French "who so well know the art of shedding a peculiar charm over social life" and her conviction that "the experience acquired by the French nation during their long and stormy Revolution will not be lost" (205). Acknowledging the failure of this European state to avoid tyranny, she is optimistic about the possibility of a European congress hoping that "the rulers of the world . . . are perhaps almost as weary of despotism as the people" (254). In her comments can be heard echoes of Rousseau's thoughts in his assessment of the future possibility of a "lasting peace" in Europe. However, she was to experience the assessment made by David Hume about "the easiness with which the many are governed by the few; and " . . . the implicite (sic) submission with which men resign their own sentiments and passion to those of their rulers" (*Of the Principles of Government*, 1758). He further observed that:

> When we enquire by what means this wonder is brought about, we shall find, that as Force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. 'Tis therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; and the maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular.[37]

Williams submitted her "sentiments and passions" to governments that initially seemed supportive of increased civil liberty. However, she did not remain consistently loyal to any government that reneged on their subscription to liberal principles and fell under the control of a few ambitious statesmen, or assumed a state of anarchy. As a radical publicist she expressed her principles independent of the various types of attempts to govern that she witnessed.

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[37] Cited by Edmund Morgan. When questioning if force is--and has--always been on the side of the governed Edmund Morgan concludes that "Hume's observations command assent" (13)

Williams and the Language of Feeling in the Culture of Sensibility

"Imagination seizes the reins which Reason drops" (*Sketches* 1801: 351).

While acknowledging the virtues of reason, Williams's writing was suffused with the language and implications of Sensibility with its appeal to the emotions. From her earliest poetry it is evident that she reflected the influence of sentimentalist philosophers, David Hume and Francis Hutcheson, who opposed the Enlightenment dependence on reason. Throughout her discourse Williams attempts to evoke feelings of empathy for the issues concerning political and social abuses.

Williams's emergence from and adoption of the language and culture of Sensibility needs to be examined in terms of the present controversies regarding Sensibility in recent scholarship. In positioning her among the writers of "radical" Sensibility, Chris Jones acknowledges her belief that Sensibility belonged not only to literary expression and social convention, but was a necessary component to theories regarding all political interactions. He observes that she "consider[ed] sensibility as compassionate responsiveness, which provides a foundation for human relationships. By showing the communal nature of sensibility, Williams implies . . . [the] social and moral responsibility to care for others, not only in the home but in the public sphere"

(Jones 136-159). Jones is critical of what he perceives to be a general tendency to oversimplify of the notion of Sensibility. As examples he cites John Mullan's emphasis on the physical evidence of it, to some degree restricting it to "body-language and a notion of sympathy which arises from intense forms of relationship, such as the communion of author and reader" (6). He disagrees with Janet Todd's interpretation of it as exhibiting like Mullan's "benevolence and utility" while developing away from "the familial fellowship of Humean sentimentalism as it became 'anti-community, a progressing away from, not into Humean social sympathy'" (6). Jones perceives Sensibility to be a complex concept with a multiplicity of manifestations. He consigns the varying, more limited expositions of it to "conflicting trends within a formation" when for a short time in the 1790s, it became an area of contention between radical and conservative discourses."

Conversely, Jerome McGann, in *The Poetry of Sensibility* (1996), criticizes Jones and others for ascribing too much "critical abstraction" to the language of Sensibility. He is an example of "a reader (of the poetry of sensibility) who has little interest in the *art* of this writing," because he interrogates it "for its social, or moral, or ideological significance" (96). He also faults Jones for what he regards as the "inadequate critical procedure" of using the terms sentiment and sensibility interchangeably "as much from a conviction of their continuity as from the inconvenient absence of an adjectival form for sensibility" (5). While disagreeing with Jones's reasoning for applying the terms sensibility and sentiment interchangeably, I agree with his acknowledgement of the complexity of its culture.

McGann defends the need to reconsider the "art" of the poetry of Sensibility, advocates the limitation of the scope of discourses on Sensibility, and declines to discuss the broader implications of the movement in eighteenth century society. He evidently wishes to preserve the art of the poetry of Sensibility from the "critical abstractions," (2) which writers like Chris Jones and Barker-Benfield attach to it. In *The Culture of Sensibility* (1992), Barker-Benfield expresses his disagreement with postructuralist thoughts on the literature of sensibility, and identifies it as the history of an "increasingly self-conscious conflict, culminating in the work and reputation of Wollstonecraft" (xxxiii). He acknowledges the broader implications of the culture of Sensibility as it became invested with spiritual and moral values beyond the "psychoperceptual scheme explained and systematized by Newton and Locke" (xvi). I believe that in the following study of Williams, it should be possible to acknowledge the metaphysical implications of her position in the culture of Sensibility, without losing sight of its other implications evident in her intellectual and emotional engagement with certain cultural expressions of political and social dimensions.

The relevance and use of Williams's convictions regarding sensibility and her use of it is reflected in J.M. Roberts's comment that Rousseau's importance to the history of thought lies in his plea that "the weight be given to the feelings and moral sense." He asserted that both were in danger of being eclipsed by the contemporary emphasis on rationality. Roberts also comments on the fact that Rousseau thought that the "men of his day were stunted creatures, partial and corrupt beings, deformed by the influence of a society which encouraged this eclipse" (667-8). In her adherence to the culture of Sensibility both as an art form, and in its implications for attitudes towards contemporary political and social issues, Williams believed that feelings were important, not only in the emotional, but in the moral sense.

The poem to Williams from the Protestant minister, Marron[38] provides a friend's perception of one political focus of her mind, and also her openness to the prompting of her emotions, "*le cœur sensible*." As noted earlier in this chapter, Williams invested "feelings" with a moral and spiritual importance. She acknowledges that such a tendency--which inhibits objectivity--caused criticism from male writers. However, I think that her intent was to provoke the thought that reason and emotion should not continually be divorced from historical commentary or political theorizing. By doing so, the lack of empathy in those who determine government for those who are governed creates a dangerous dissonance with the potential for reducing concern about humanitarian issues.

According to Deborah Kennedy, Williams believed that sensibility "could cut across barriers of gender and class, and make compassion a guiding principle for human society." Others, both male and female, in eighteenth century society saw it as "equalizing since it occurred in all ranks" ("Storms of Sorrow" 88-89). This perspective explains Williams' s early acceptance by the reading public of all social strata. However, such regard declined with the negative criticism that met her later political commentary not only because it was supportive of revolution, but also because she had presumed to become involved in politics. To certain contemporary traditional intellectuals like Hannah More, may be added Laetita Matilda Hawkins who considered political commitment an inappropriate occupation for a female, "descending below the level of necessity." [39] Her comments illustrate intolerance for female preoccupation with political affairs, and the educational influences of Williams's Rational Dissenting mentors. Moreover, they are also indicative of the indifference of a majority of citizens to the type of theoretical reform that Williams perceived to be necessary for positively reshaping social and political values.

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[38] Cited previously in this chapter.

In providing a means of political consciousness-raising through poems, political commentary, and social gatherings, Williams evidently hoped to further encourage awareness and subsequent involvement of others, in effecting change in political and social custom. From her early publications of verse to her final text of reflections, she clothes her comments with expressions of empathy. Reasoning that "the universal parent of the human race" (*Letters* 1790: 30) could not have intended sensibility to the feelings of others to be "confined to the artificial wants of vanity, the ideal deprivations of greatness," she believed sensitivity to the condition of others a vital component of more evolved civil society. She also "found the concept of sensibility compatible with her Unitarian commitment to religious and political reform" (Kennedy 89). Consequently, she equated its neglect with aggression, congenital in oppression when accompanied by limitation of an inherent capacity to grasp that the intent of life is to move toward that "nobility stamped on our nature by God" (*Letters* 1790: 218).

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[39] Laetitia Matilda Hawkins *Letters on the Female Mind* 1793 (Letter II)

Conclusion

Within the following chapters themes of Sensibility, Education, and Liberty are set within the context of biographical details. Through this study I intend to aid the process of provoking interest in Helen Maria Williams as a radical who confidently and faithfully spent her adult life writing about political and social issues which she thought crucial to the evolution of more liberal governments, and a more progressive civil society. Her books, which had been eagerly sought for comment on the Revolution, lost their appeal to English readers during the early nineteenth century Counter-Revolutionary reaction. However, she continued to write on familiar political and social themes, and their fate in Napoleonic times. Throughout the changing fortunes of the government reform, Williams retained her own principles that determined her attitude and seemed to provide her with the fortitude necessary to continue her perceived life's work and interest. The following study provides the broader implications of the scope of her writings and style of life throughout lifetime involvement in some of the major issues of her day. The accomplishments of her career and domestic life indicate the strength of her female mind and spirit in a world that was generally unused to such concern about political issues and such a degree of social involvement from a woman.

CHAPTER III

Affecting "Masculine Knowledge"?

1761-1781

> Train our youth to the new light which is now almost everywhere burning out in favour of the civil rights of man, and the great objects and uses of civil government. While so favourable a wind is abroad, let every young mind expand itself, catch the rising gale, and partake of the glorious enthusiasm, the great objects which are flourishing in the state of science, arts, manufactures and commerce, the extinction of wars, with the calamities incident to mankind for them, the abolishing of all useless distinctions, which were the offspring of a barbarous age.
>
> Joseph Priestley 1771[40]

During her formative years in the milieu of Radical Dissent, the intellectual development and political principles of Helen Maria Williams were influenced by the thoughts and writings of her mentor, Andrew Kippis, and other academicians like Joseph Priestley. Throughout her discourse may be detected echoes of the sentiments expressed by Priestley summarized in the quotation introducing this chapter. Williams would later be criticized for her interest in politics. It was considered by most to be, as Laetitia Matilda Hawkins conveyed to her, a study positioned in the "climax of unfitness" so strongly "barred against the admission of females" that she was astonished they would ever venture to approach it.[41] However, such criticism towards Williams did not develop until the 1790s. After the years of her informal education influenced by her mother and Kippis, Williams was to enter the public eye as a poet and novelist seemingly circumscribed by the "rules" that governed acceptable discourse from women of that time. Yet, beneath this conforming exterior, thoughts like those alluded to by Priestley were evidently germinating, and burst onto the publishing scene in the early 1790s. This chapter traces the type of influences that produced the radical commentator that Williams eventually became. The importance of the educational process that shaped her intellect and emotions cannot be overstressed since its results--together with a strong religious faith--produced a woman confident in social and political principles that retained the English Radicalism of her youthful experience. It caused her to value individual freedom of conscience and expression in an era when it was unusual for a woman to cross the boundaries to which prevailing societal norms were determined that she should adhere. However, her mind expanded to "catch the rising gale, and partake in the glorious enthusiasm" of Priestley's vision.

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[40] Priestley's *First Principles* was "a defence of intellectual enquiry that drew [him] into the political and ecclesiolgical debate of the late 1760s, and formed the nucleus of his most complete statement on political thought" (*Political Writings*. Ed. Miller xiv).

[41] From *Letters on the Female Mind, its Powers and Pursuits. Addressed to Miss H.M.Williams*, 1793. (Qtd. in *Women*. Ed. Jones : 117-120)

Towards "Masculine Knowledge"

> [W]omen it is said have no business with politics, – Why not? – Have they no interest in the scenes that are acting around them, in which their fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, or friends engaged! – Even in the commonest course of female education, they are expected to acquire some knowledge of history and yet, if they are to have no opinion of what is passing, it avails little that they should be informed of what has passed, in a world where they are subject to such mental degradation; where they are censured as affecting masculine knowledge if they happen to have any understanding; or despised as

> insignificant triflers if they have none.[42]

In the preface of *Desmond*, the fourth of her twelve novels, Charlotte Smith expresses an attitude that prevailed in the eighteenth century regarding women, education and politics. The following excerpt from François Fenelon's *Treatise on the Education of Daughters* provides the opinion of a man towards problems he perceived to be endemic in the education of women. His *Treatise* was first published in 1687, and its English translation followed in 1707. The fact that it was reprinted in 1805 is "a measure of its continuing importance (or renewed need)" (Jones 99) at the beginning of the nineteenth century during the counter-revolutionary, conservative movement that affected the content of women's education. Fenelon asks:

> What intrigues does history present to us - what subversion of laws and manners - what bloody wars - what innovations in religion - what revolution of states - all arising from the irregularities of women? Ought not these associations to impress us with the importance of female education.[43]

By assuming a career as a political commentator, Williams experienced criticism for "affecting masculine knowledge," and also for contributing, by virtue of her radical political and religious affiliations, to the "subversion of laws and manners," and "innovations in religion." She was, however, sufficiently educated and talented to be able to join the minority of eighteenth century women whose work was accepted for publication. Her father's death when she was eight and absence of brothers negated any immediate male family proclivities she may have absorbed. Nevertheless, the influence of Andrew Kippis, one of the foremost intellectuals in eighteenth century Rational Dissent, combined with the early education and support she received from her mother,[44] provided the impetus for her career and her political principles. After the publication of her pro-American independence poem, *Ode on the Peace* (1783), Williams disregarded the prevailing attitude towards women and politics and became ardently involved in the sphere of "masculine knowledge." In this chapter I will trace influences affecting her education, and set her experiences in the context of the debate concerning trends in educational theory and practice in the mid to late eighteenth century. As alluded to in the introduction of this chapter, it was her education among politically and educationally involved intellectuals who sought to change the structure of society that motivated her career as a publicist and apologist for radical liberal politics. Her acknowledgment of the importance of philosophers such as Milton, Sidney, Locke, Rousseau and Condorcet, (*Letters* 1792: 114-117) positions her among those who believed that "institutions should be restructured as often as the change in circumstance demanded and new enlightenment had been gained" (Hansen 10), and who were part of a progressive, liberal tradition in which education was perceived as the means by which this intent could be fulfilled.

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[42] Cited from preface of Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* 1792 (1997).

[43] From the section "*On the Importance of the Education of Daughters*" cited in *Women*. Ed. Vivien Jones 102-4).

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[44] From occasional references to Mrs. Helen Williams, both in her daughter's writing and by others, it may be inferred that she was supportive of her eldest child's publishing career, her radical politics and her settlement in France after 1791. Her name appears with that of Helen Maria Williams on an arrest warrant in France, 1793 (Woodward 173). She appears to have lived with or near her daughter until her death in 1812.

An Education in Dissent

Since few references to Williams, and no family papers or journals are extant from the years of her childhood to the time she turned eighteen, any attempt to elaborate on the context of her formative years remains speculative. A few details of the ancestry of Williams are available[45] indicating that the family had been associated with religious dissent for several generations. Her mother was descended from a Protestant family named Hay, originating in Naughton, Scotland and her ancestors had been supporters of the Protestant cause. Her maternal grandfather, George Hay, an infantry captain, married Mary Balfour in 1724. In 1827, their great grandson, Charles Coquerel, child of Williams's sister, Cecilia, made a copy of a banner passed to him for safe keeping by his grandmother. The white, red and blue banner indicated that the family had fought for "the Protestant Religion and for Liberty" and was dated 1643, showing their opposition to Charles I. The fight for "liberty" was to become a constant theme in the writings of her daughter, Helen Maria. Williams's father, Charles Williams, an army officer from Aberconway in Wales, had Huguenot connections since his grandfather had married the daughter of a refugee merchant from La Rochelle following the repeal of the Edict of Nantes.[46]

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[45] I have relied upon some of Lionel Woodward's pre-1930 research evident in *Hélène-Maria Williams et Ses Amis* (1977) for details no longer available. Some of these were obtained from interviews of descendants of Williams, and from French sources that I have not been able to access.

[46] Woodward 11-13.

In later years, Williams was to write about the persecution of Protestants in Languedoc, Southern France, and her nephew Athanase Coquerel documented the notorious Calas case,[47] which involved the persecution of a Protestant family. Williams was eight or nine when her father died in 1769. Sometime before or after this date the family moved to Berwick-on-Tweed in Northumberland.

A major question which I needed to address when considering the type of educational and societal influences to which Williams might have been exposed was how to determine the extent of her connection to Radical Dissent and progressive liberal political perspectives. Opinions she expressed in her later political commentaries suggested to me that she felt committed to Enlightenment theories of progress through education, to reform of feudal legislation, and increased civil liberty. Like other radical political commentators such as Andrew Kippis ,[48] Richard Price, and Joseph Priestley, Williams was opposed to any form of despotism which threatened to enslave people whether physically, intellectually or morally.

Because so few details of Williams's early life have yet become available to researchers, I consider a poetic eulogy which she composed on the death of Andrew Kippis to be of considerable importance in my attempt to gain an understanding of educational and social influences affecting her intellectual development. The poem, published after Kippis's death in 1795, is indicative of the type of influence he had on Williams between her early childhood and her first publication in 1781. Since he was a leading Rational Dissenting educator and advocate of government reform in the mid to late eighteenth century, her association with him places her within the circle of Dissenters who not only agitated for reform in England, but also supported reform and revolutionary movements in America and in the rest of Europe. Awareness that Kippis was a close associate and mentor to Williams enabled me to determine part of the educational, social, and religious context to which she was exposed. In the poem published in *Gentleman's Magazine* in January 1796,Williams reflects:

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[47] The persecution of the Calas family is also detailed by David Bien in *The Calas Affair* (1960).

[48] Kippis kept a diary from 1754 to about sixteen days before his death in 1795. It might prove to be an important source of information about Williams's life if it ever becomes available.

> Him through the lengthening scenes, I mark'd with pride,
> My earliest teacher and my later guide.
> First in the house of prayer, his voice impressed
> Celestial precepts on my infant breast;
> The hope that rests above, my childhood taught,
> And lifted first to God my ductile thought.
>
> When first with timid hand I touched the lyre,
> And felt the youthful poet's proud desire;
> His liberal comment fann'd the dawning flame,
> His plaudits sooth'd me with a poet's name;
> Led by his comments to the public shrine,
> He bade the trembling hope to please be mine. (66)[49]

Comments in the poem about the effect Kippis had on her indicate that following her birth in 1761, Williams probably lived for the first few years of her life in association with the dissenting congregations [50] near the London district of Westminster where Kippis was a Presbyterian/Unitarian minister from 1753. Also that her family were close to Newington Green, a village south of Hoxton. Ever since one of the first dissenting academies was established at Hackney, the area had attracted "dissident intellectuals, pedagogues with reforming ideas and Dissenters."[51] It is probable that Williams spent her earliest years in an atmosphere such as Anthony Lincoln projects when he observes:

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[49] Other parts of the poem indicate that he also continued a correspondence with her during the time that she was in France, and that she was particularly appreciative of his support during 1793.

> it was in the quiet places of retirement, in Newington Green and Hackney where Price spent his life; at Stoke Newington where Samuel Rogers grew up that the best side of the dissenting life was to be seen. There were to be found dispassionate politics, cordial disagreement; all that *esprit de salon* which grew to maturity in Warrington, and attained culmination . . . in the Academy at Hackney. (30)

Dissenting poet Anna Laetitia Barbauld, who later associated herself with Williams in radical political debate, had connections with the Warrington Academy in Liverpool where her father, John Aikin taught, and which had been founded by Joseph Priestley, a close friend of Kippis and Richard Price. She wrote of it and Hackney as

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[50] Such congregations were composed of a variety of non-conformists including Presbyterians, Unitarians, Socinians, and Arians.

[51] Anthony Lincoln quotes Daniel Defoe's recollection of Morton's Academy, which was associated with Newington Green. Defoe gave the assurance that "neither in . . . politics, government, and discipline, nor any other exercise of that school was there anything taught or even conveyed that was anti-monarchical, or destructive to the constitution of England" (87).

"the seats where science loved to dwell, / Where liberty, her ardent spirit breathed."[52] Noting the anti-traditionalist orientation of the Rational Dissenters she described them as

> a speculative people fond of novel doctrines, and who by accustoming themselves to make the most fundamental truths the subject of discussion, have divested their minds of the reverence which is generally felt for opinions and practices of long standing, (believing) that the world is ever to look for its improvement or reformation. (Kramnick 50)

Kippis taught at Coward's Academy from 1763[53] until he moved to Hackney in 1784, remaining there for only a few years. Evidently he was still residing in the area when Williams returned to London in 1781. From comments in the preface he wrote to her first published work in the following year--together with the evidence in the 1796 poem--it may be inferred that he encouraged her to write and to publish.

Considering the importance of Kippis to Williams's life and writing,[54] it is relevant to provide contemporary assessments of him. Andrew Kippis was among the Rational Dissenters of whom Gilbert Wakefield wrote: "These, take them all together, are, in one word the most respectable set of men I know; genuine lovers of truth, liberty and science" (Lincoln 31). A partial assessment of Kippis's character may be glimpsed from the funeral oration for Kippis following his death in October 1795 at the age of seventy-six. In his funeral address at this time, Reverend Abraham Rees, a fellow tutor, reflects the general consensus of opinion evident from the few sources yet available concerning Kippis's character. Rees observed that Kippis was

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[52] In her *Memoirs* of her father (1833) John Aikin, Lucy Aikin observed that after the independence of America and the "free discussions of fundamental political principles" that Aikin felt encouraged to "become a strenuous supporter of civil liberty, in whatever quarter of the world her banner was displayed" (46).

[53] In 1762, Kippis was elected trustee of Dr. Daniel Williams's Library on Cross Street in London where statistics were collected from congregations of dissenters in London and Westminster. The Library is still in existence.

[54] I provide further evidence of his support of and influence on Williams in Chapter XI.

> mild and gentle, benevolent and candid, his address and manners always polite, easy and uncommonly conciliatory . . . Though he had acquired a high degree of eminence and reputation, he was without pride and vanity, superciliousness, or self-importance, and he engaged the esteem and love of persons of all ranks and stations in life . . . [his] profound and extensive knowledge . . . rendered him a most instructive and entertaining companion . . . his general conduct and demeanor towards his pupils, not only engaged their attention, but secured their respect and warm affection.[55]

A funeral eulogy may have presented an exaggeration of the finer aspects of Kippis's character, but another assessment by John Wilkes indicates a similar impression. Writing of Kippis and his associates in Dissent, he observes: "There are not in Europe men of more liberal ideas, more general knowledge, more cultivated to form the rising generation to give the state wise and virtuous citizens, than the doctors Price, Priestley, and Kippis" (Wilkes 17). Rees also describes how Kippis was always accessible to his young students and how he displayed an encouraging attitude not only to their studies, but also to their "public labours." As already noted, Kippis was later to help Williams to publish. He showed the same encouragement to his pupils William Godwin and Thomas Holcroft after they left the Hackney Academy (Woodcock 25). Excelling in classics, history, biography, and *belles-lettres*, Kippis was also politically involved beyond commenting on the perceived injustice of the limitations placed on Dissenters. Woodcock observes that in politics, Kippis was an uncompromising radical, and played an active and prominent part in various liberal and reformist movements of his day (15). In 1773 he published a "Vindication of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers with Regard to their Late Application to Parliament" after an unsuccessful lobby for the enlargement of the Act of Toleration. Rees also noted of Kippis, "[the] cause of genuine, civil and religious liberty had in him an enlightened, steady, consistent, temperate friend and advocate" (*Gentleman's Magazine* Oct. 1795: 67). Such an attitude characterized Williams's years of involvement in political commentary and participation.

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[55] From comments made by Abram Rees at Kippis's funeral in October 1795 (*Gentleman's Magazine*, Oct. 1795 lxv, lxvi, lxxiv).

Of Rational Dissenters like Kippis, Plumb notes that they were "the most effective body of men in public propaganda;" and that, on the whole, they agreed with "Smith, Bentham, Wesley, Fox, and Burke, but limited their horizons and engaged in practical activity" (Plumb 133). He further notes Kippis, Price, and Priestley were "teachers and leaders of consistently intellectual ability and complete integrity of purpose . . . their aim being theological, but their appeal intellectual." Williams too was to involve herself in transmitting ideas and speculating in intellectual terms, and was noted even by her detractors to be invariably sincere. Kippis was seen in later life as concerned mainly with Unitarians and according to Rees "was careful to offer divine worship only to one God, Father of all." On the occasions when Williams touches on religion, she clearly acknowledged a worship of God as the Creator, but makes no mention of the worship of Christ. George Woodstock notes that by the time Kippis was tutor to William Godwin in 1775, he "had long rejected Calvinism and . . . adhered to the doctrines of Arminius.[56]" Also "he had a tendency to be sympathetic towards the Socinians[57]" (Woodcock 14-15). The Dissenting congregations in the 1770s were of mixed dissenting views.

Anne Katharine Elwood provides a glimpse of the educational and family experiences of Barbauld which, given their common background in Dissent and their supportive families, were probably similar to those of Williams. She writes of Barbauld:

> [She] early evinced an uncommon aptitude for study, as even in infancy she was described by her mother as 'a little girl who was as eager to learn as her instructors could be to teach her' . . . Her education was entirely domestic . . . Fortunately, she had the advantage of religious and enlightened parents, and of having associated much with Dr. Doddridge appears to have participated in some degree, in the prejudices of those who would debar females from all acquaintance with classical literature, and for some time he withstood his daughter's wish to be instructed in the learned languages. She at length overcame his scruples, and . . .[read Latin and Greek] . . . Her talents were, doubtlessly, appreciated by the congenial minds with whom she now associated . . . [A] volume of poems . . . made their appearance in 1773. (*Memoirs of the Literary Ladies* 1843: 225)

An article " On the Literary Education of Women" (from Mr. Knox's *Liberal*

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[56] Arminianism/ Arianism was a rational Christian faith that influenced the development of Methodism and Unitarianism. It arose in the early seventeenth century as a liberal reaction to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, and in part maintained that human dignity depended on unimpaired free will.

[57] Lincoln indicates that "the epithet [for heresy] was 'Socinian" and was used "in a free way to cover a number of things from belief in the system of Faustus Socinius to sympathy with the politics of Paine" (61). Like Arianism, it influenced Unitarianism.

Education), appearing in the *New Annual Register* in 1781[58] possibly provides an indication of the philosophical views of Kippis on education that influenced Williams's adolescent education. The author asserts:

> It does not seem to me, that a woman will be rendered less acceptable in the world, or worse qualified to perform any part of her duty in it by having employed the time between 6 – 16, in the cultivation of her mind. (178-9)

The article recommends learning some Latin and French. Also, after "orthography and grammar, she may proceed to the cultivation of taste. Milton, Addison, and Pope[59] [who] must be the standing models in English" (179). Of particular interest is the observation that the mind of a woman "in easy circumstances," and possessing "genius," is "certainly capable of improvement, as that of the other sex . . . the method must be exactly the same as that which is used in the private tuition of boys[60]" (180). Regarding the education of women at boarding schools the writer cautioned that "large seminaries for young ladies are in danger of great corruption," and advised the employment of a private tutor.

The branch of Dissent to which Williams belonged remains unclear. She remained as tolerant as Kippis towards most other religions, later entering into close acquaintanceships with as diverse a combination as the French Abbé, Sieyes, and Marron, a leading Protestant minister in Paris (*Letters* 1792: 185, 1796: 118).

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[58] Founded by Kippis is 1781.

[59] Williams frequently quoted from each of these poets.

[60] Both Catharine Macaulay and Mary Wollstonecarft asserted this later in the 1780s and early 1790s.

However, she criticized those of any faith who were fanatical and inclined to persecute others, and evidently perceived religion to be a personal and private matter of conscience. Her patriotism, always a feature of her comments on England (*Letters* 1792: 115), prevented her from any open condemnation of the limitations on the rights of Dissenters when she compared Britain's record of intolerance to the persecutions elsewhere. With evident patriotic fervor, she comments concerning the persecution of Protestants in Languedoc

> [that in England] indignation beat high in every British bosom. The various associations, which watch with wakeful jealousy over the civil and religious rights of mankind, expressed in their addresses . . .all the energy of virtuous resentment, impatient for redress . . . Favoured and glorious England! . . . the arbitress of moral action--guardian of the wronged, whatever region they might inhabit. (*On the Persecution* 1816)

Another guide to Williams's attitude towards religion was that, like Barbauld, she wrote hymns. One, "My God! All nature owns thy sway," appears in the 1795 hymn book of Dr. Kippis which included six hundred and fifty hymns and was compiled by Kippis, Rees, and Thomas Jervis to replace the former dependence on Isaac Watt's *Psalms* in Dissenting societies in London. The belief in liberty of conscience that pervades Williams's writing accounts for her toleration of all religious faiths. In connection with this it is relevant to note that Kippis believed with regard to the Test Act[61] that:

> Religion in every form of it which is consistent with the safety of the state, has an unlimited title of indulgence - I do not, therefore, think that liberty of

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[61] Kippis wrote "A Vindication of the Protestant dissenting Ministers with regard to their late Application to Parliament" for an enlargement of the Test Act in 1773.

> conscience ought to be confined to Christianity, I am of the opinion that the magistrate has no right to interfere in religious matters, so as to lay any restraint upon, or to proscribe any test on those who behave as peaceable subjects. (*Vindication* 1773)

Freedom of thought, free inquiry, and expression were basic tenets of the principles of Rational Dissenters like Kippis and became so to Williams. Later she noted the importance of *"l'alliance . . . qui règne entre les connaissances qui élevent et agrandissent l'âme, et entre les sentimens de liberté et d'indépendance"* (*Souvenirs* 159) [the alliance which reigns between knowledge which elevates and enlarges the soul, and between the sentiments of liberty and independence]. Other aspects also evident in her thoughts are Kippis's attachment to the greater interests in mankind. Reflecting on her youth, she notes that she had been accustomed since then to consider humanitarian causes (12-13). It would seem logical to assume Kippis's influence here.

History and especially biography had a particular fascination for Kippis. Although Williams did not later regard herself as a historian because of her belief in the expression of feelings and opinion in her writing with her tendency to partisanship and subjectivity, she reflects Kippis's attitude towards historical writing. He believed that:

> [a] history that is written without any regard to the chief privilege of human nature, and without feelings, especially of the moral kind, must lose a considerable part of its instruction and energy.

By the preceding digression on Kippis I have indicated several political and religious beliefs, and traits in personality that are similar to those displayed by Williams. I am inclined to the opinion that his influence was more than that of an intellectual and religious mentor. Given the proof revealed in the poem written by Williams after his death, it is evident that he was not only an influence on her early life, but remained supportive of her during her early years in France. The type of education Williams received remains speculative. However, from it and through the emotional connections that she made during its acquisition, Williams attained the "masculine knowledge" which was disparaged by the traditionalists as later evidence from her detractors indicated. She evidently acquired considerable understanding of politics. Although she was despised, also by traditionalists, as one of the "insignificant triflers" to whom Charlotte Smith referred,[62] she proved knowledgeable and was respected by the radical, progressive intellectuals.

Two controversies in educational theory and practice, which developed in Williams's early years, affected the type of knowledge and value system to which she was exposed. One concerned the attempt by radical, progressive element, many of whom were Dissenters, to create an educational system that was more relevant to the needs of the growing, increasingly commercially-conscious middle class. The other debate concerned those who wished to see improvement and progress in women's education--although it was not generally expected that women could absorb the type of knowledge men could--or that they needed to.

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[62] Cited in the introductory quotation to this chapter.

Eighteenth Century Controversies in the Theory and Practice of Education

I. The Dissenting Perspective on Education

An example of a response to the need for change in the theory and practice of education was evident in Priestley's "denunciation of classicism," and "the organization of independent academies giving forms of instruction more appropriate to the age" (Vaughan and Arden 48). Lecturers like Priestley at Warrington, and Kippis at Coward/Hoxton attempted to educate "for a more liberal world view" with an education "meant to create a different type of citizen, one who might challenge majority traditional values" (Curtis 110). As a person raised among Rational Dissenting educators, Williams evidently received encouragement to read widely and to publish. An example of a woman raised among those with more traditional views was Mary Wollstonecraft. It was only when she came into contact with Richard Price during her attempt to open a school at Newington Green that she met the first "radical intellectual" (Tomalin 31). She found support for her enterprise and discovered that the Rational Dissenters were "respectful of their womenfolk" softening the earlier cynicism she had acquired from her childhood experiences of "the relations of the sexes" (35). Williams's confidence, displayed by her publications, her relocation in revolutionary France and her salon involvement, was doubtless a result of a supportive environment during her early years among Rational Dissenters.

Williams did not attend any of the numerous boarding schools which developed in the mid to late eighteenth century, and was unable to attend either the traditional grammar schools, or the Dissenting academies available to men. However, she benefited from an education among an "enlightened" group that sought to create an educational system which taught subjects beyond the narrow traditional focus on the classics.

In the first half of the eighteenth century groups of such men eager to see increased progress in education, science, industry, and the arts began to form philosophical and literary societies. Many of the members were well educated middle class dissenters educated in the academies that had developed from those of the late seventeenth century nonconformists who had been expelled from establishment universities like Oxford and Cambridge for refusing to subscribe to the Thirty Nine Articles of the Anglican church. One of the best known of these groups was the Lunar Society of Birmingham established in 1764. In *Studies in the History of Education* 1780-1870, Brian Simon observes that the fact that they met in a Unitarian chapel was indicative of another "of the bonds uniting the middle-class of the industrial cities." Identifying the Unitarians as the most rational and advanced of dissenting sects, Simon identifies among their adherents, members of leading middle-class families. He asserts that their ministers "took a prominent part in intellectual and social life and their chapels became the centres of philosophical, scientific, and literary discussion and enquiry" (18). The society contained such innovative, progressive thinkers as Kippis's associate, Joseph Priestley. Also involved were Erasmus Darwin, James Watt, James Keir, Samuel Galton, Thomas Day, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, and Josiah Wedgwood (19).

Groups of liberal dissenters such as those among the members of the

Manchester Philosophical Society evolved throughout Britain. Simons observes:

> The growing interest in the study, advancement and application of science, coupled with advocacy of wider educational reforms, represented in a sense the revival of an educational outlook which had been obscured for over a century; one originally associated with Francis Bacon. (26)

The writings of Bacon, Descartes, and Locke had prepared the way for a critical evolution of institutions in relation to human progress (Hansen 4). Their books were evident in the libraries and texts of the dissenting academies. There also existed a conception of method that made it possible to conceive of a directed progress of humanity "in their indication of the need for a science of human development" (4). William Godwin, a student of Kippis, observed in *Political Justice*: "If science is capable of perpetual improvement, men will also be capable of perpetually advancing in practical wisdom and justice" (51). Like Godwin, many Rational Dissenters believed in the ultimate perfectibility of man. Instead of adhering to the traditional education through the classics which prevailed in most controlled establishment public and grammar schools endowed by state and church, they were the products of dissenting academies that possessed curricula responsible for transmitting more recently developed knowledge in philosophy, science, and literature.

Barred from establishment universities, Dissenters had begun the foundation of academies of higher learning in the seventeenth century. Dissenting academies numbered close to fifteen hundred before their decline at the end of the eighteenth century. In his detailed survey of dissenting education Anthony Lincoln notes that "the history of significant dissenting opinion in the years 1763 to 1800 is the history of Rational Dissenters" (4). They were a vital force which helped shape the ethics of the evolving industrial society especially with regard to the principles of the middle-class. Eager for a restructuring of society, they agitated for political and social reform and innovation creating apprehension and opposition in traditionalists, and élites in state and church who feared a loss of their former control. As Marilyn Butler observes, "throughout the eighteenth century, the Dissenters provided an element of pacific dissidence in English society, a tradition of individualism and levelling . . . they played down religious, magical and liturgical aspects, and stressed instead the moral and the rational" (Ty xiii). In *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1791(I: 556), appeared a similar observation noting that the "Dissenters are levellers by principle and education." In the eighteenth century, Robert Hall commenting on their "individualism" noted that "the religious opinions of the Dissenters are so numerous that there is, perhaps, no point in which they are agreed, except in asserting the rights of conscience against all human control" (Lincoln 19).

Dissenting education was founded on the belief in a "natural right" theory, "a psychological theory and a religious precept" (67). By nature it was thought that a child had a right to receive education: "by nature the parent had a right to give it to him and to decide the content of it" (67). Apart from the comments of Kippis and Priestley regarding the right to education, Philip Furneaux admonished that children "should be carefully raised up in the knowledge and practice of the social duties" (68). In *Education: the Business of Life*, Henry Ware notes that "life itself [was] but one long day - school . . .(and that) education [was] the business of life" (1837: 271). Daniel Walker Howe concludes that "in Unitarian moral philosophy, education was a never ending process of self-cultivation and growth; it did not even cease with death, for the Harvard Liberals thought of heaven as a place where self-improvement continued forever" (256).

Side by side with the natural rights theory existed the "psychological creed derived from the school of sensation and experience . . . and to attain a millennium in human affairs by means of education seemed a simple and rational aspiration" (Lincoln 68). Locke's theory of the *tabula rasa* was accepted, and Furneaux observed in his 1775 sermon on the importance of education that there is "a desire and thirst of knowledge and instruction which is natural to the mind of man" (80).

The academies evolved to provide much of the impetus for the main reforming movements in the eighteenth century. In student expectations their curricula and practice surpassed the establishment universities of Oxford or Cambridge. Isaac Watts identified the need for grammar, logic, geometry, geography, astronomy, natural philosophy, and poetry most of which were not taught at the Anglican universities. Kippis and Priestley both emphasized the teaching of history and regarded the study of politics as a science. From a sampling of a list of some of the 670 books held in the Warrington Academy several of the main topics of study in the Rational Dissenting academies may be inferred. Among the books noted in *Records of Nonconformity* are: Philip Doddridge's lectures (the most widely used text apart from Locke), edited by Kippis; Grotius' *De jure*; Hobbes; Hartley *On Man*, Locke's *Works* and several copies of his *Essay on Human Understanding*, Milton's *Works*; Puffendorf, *De Officio Hominis* and *Rights and Liberty of the People Vindicated*; Voltaire; Montesquieu's *Lettres*, and Le Clerc (Lincoln 83).

Rational Dissenters like Kippis, Price, and Priestley were in close contact with new advancements in knowledge, and new philosophies on the Continent. The fact that the academies included European languages such as German, French, and Italian in their curriculum made such knowledge more accessible to them. They were especially in communication with the French *philosophes* who had also been influenced by the writings of John Locke. Marie-Jean Condorcet, a leading exponent of a national education plan in early Revolutionary France assumed the perfectibility of humanity through education, a perspective allied to the ideologies of the Rational Dissenters. In his *Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, and in a manner similar to Godwin, he asserts that the purpose of his writing was

> to show that . . .nature has set no terms to the perfectibility of human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite; and that the progress of this perfectibility from now onwards has no other limits than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us. (Barroclough 154)

In 1790 Williams wrote enthusiastically of the fact that Condorcet was then employed on a plan for public education and there could be "no doubt that he will execute the work he has undertaken with that philosophical spirit, and that extensive knowledge, which he possesses in so conspicuous and eminent a degree" (*Letters* II: 117).

After her first successful publication in 1782, Williams gained acknowledgement among the female intellectual circles in London, and dedicated her *Ode on the Peace* (1783) to Elizabeth Montagu, essayist, and literary hostess referred to as the "Queen of the Bluestockings" (Jones 184). However, it was unlikely that discussions in such groups of wealthy, well-educated women included discussions of the type of educational ambitions of the Rational Dissenters, or that the members entertained radical views about women's education. From John Doran's account of Elizabeth Montagu's life, it is apparent that those attending were supporters of the established order of the state and church. Hannah More, herself an advocate for increased education for women but opposed to radicals like Wollstonecraft and Williams, provided a description of those attending the "pleasant and instructive parties" at Montagu's salon. They included "Christian poets, skilled physicians, honest lawyers, men of all shades of politics, with princes of the church, [and] ladies of *ton*" (Doran 205). However much Williams may have enjoyed her acceptance at such a salon in her early twenties, her education among the Rational Dissenters had already inclined her towards criticism of the established order. Seven years later when visiting the French salon of the Girondin radical Marie-Jeanne Roland, she was already sympathetic to the Revolution.[63] It was in the French salons that the radical ideas she had absorbed as a youth were discussed. She participated in salon discussions in Paris with those who were attempting to bring radical change to French society, people who spoke of the subject which began to preoccupy her later in the 1780s, "Liberty." However, she noted that only "*portions éclairées*" [enlightened groups] had any profound comprehension of the social and political understanding required to achieve a more liberal social, and political order, and that abstract theory rarely penetrated the majority beyond the confines of salon gatherings *(Souvenirs* 57). Her concern about the limited practical progress of education and the results are evident in her comment that "*le secrèt de la tyrannie est ignorance*" (13) [the secret of tyranny is ignorance], and "when ignorance becomes the sport of fanaticism and ambitious men . . . it becomes the most terrible in the list of human evils" (*Letters on Events* 1819 Preface).

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[63] The development of Williams's radicalism will be discussed in Chapter V of this study.

Rational Dissenting educators attempted to publicize the need for more comprehensive forms of education. Their hoped for society could continue a natural progress that they perceived had been temporarily impeded by traditionalists, who feared change and a loss of their positions in the old hierarchy in government and society, or who regarded the established order as God-ordained.

Together with the controversies about subjects to be taught in schools was also the debate about the theory of education in relation to women. Some women writers were agitating for more equal treatment of women, and the desirability of increasing their access to education available to men. Less radical views focused on the "duties" of a woman in the domestic sphere, and the need to provide her with more education to improve and increase her domestic contribution. Even those with more radical perspectives engaged in speculation about the degree to which a woman's mental capacities and economic circumstances would allow her access and response to knowledge that had been traditionally limited to men.

Since the diversity of opinions that affected responses to educational experience and practice provide another facet of the milieu of Helen Williams's early life, I have included the following section which presents a brief survey to illustrate the range of traditional and radical perspectives on the general education of children, and of girls in particular.

II Towards a More Progressive Education?

In 1797 David Williams, a leading dissenting minister, who was critical of traditional educational theory and practice, stated that "the general purpose of education [is] the acquaintance of knowledge, virtue and happiness" (*Lectures on Education* 1797 62). He reasoned that "men are not rendered intelligent and virtuous because children are commanded, not instructed, and obliged to learn maxims; not to acquire information, or practice duties" (60), and contended that children were often "put to books" with the teachers acting as a "librarian" in authority (72). He faulted the contemporary state of education in which "the sensibility, affections, and reason were formed by ignorance rather than knowledge, by accident rather than prudence" (50).

Despite the more progressive attitude among rational dissenters, only boys had access to their academies. Generally girls were educated at home as Williams was. Kippis indicated that: "the only instruction which Helen received was from her wise and virtuous mother" (*Edwin and Eltruda* 1782 Preface).

Questions concerning the sources of Williams's early knowledge may be partly answered by an acknowledgement of the type of texts that were probably available to her as a child. The Dissenters with whom she was acquainted were used to sharing books, and texts from lending libraries were also available. Added to the Dublin edition of Charlotte Smith's *Minor Morals* (1798), by the publisher H. Colbert is a list of book titles and authors for the use of children in school and at home. The fact that the list includes - apart from literature - texts on history, geography, religion, natural history, science, and botany, and that several of the authors were dissenters also indicates the likelihood of her access to them. The list includes Anna Laetitia Barbauld and John Aikin's *Evenings at Home*, lessons and hymns by Anna Laetitia Barbauld; Priestley's lectures on history; natural history, and travelogues by Dr. Mavor; Scripture readings by John Watkins; *Lessons of a Governess*, and the *Young Exiles* by Stephanie die Genlis; Thomas Day's popular *Sandford and Merton*; Sarah Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories;* Turner's *Arts and Sciences*, Gray's *Memoria Technica*, or *Method of Artificial Memory*; Croxdall's *Fables of Aesop*; Goldsmith's *History of England*, and books relating to the discovery of America by Elizabeth Helme. Also advertised is the *Monthly Preceptor*, a journal which included lectures on natural philosophy and "other sciences, biology, biographies arithmetic, astronomy, ethics, German, French Italian, and geography." Prizes to be given each month included globes, planetariums, telluria, electrical machines, telescopes, and microscopes. Such literature and educational equipment was more likely to be found in dissenting homes and academies than in the more traditional schools.

By the mid eighteenth century women authors of texts on educational theory and method became increasingly evident in the controversy about the type of education suitable for a woman. Some like Laetitia Matilda Hawkins reechoed sentiments expressed by the men, the majority of whom believed in limiting women's knowledge to that which would be useful in the care of home and children. The popularity of James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* in the eighteenth century is an indication of the majority attitude towards female education. While "persuaded that women of worth and sense are to be found every where," Fordyce believed that they were "most frequently [to be found] in the calm of retreat, and amongst the coolness of recollection," and that "the good use of an affection for knowledge . . . is that of preventing idleness and dissipation."

Erasmus Darwin believed in the need to increase access to a variety of subjects including, in addition to the usual reading, writing, drawing, and morals, history, arithmetic, geography, natural history, mythology, polite literature, arts, and sciences.[64] Of the approximately 220 books suggested several were on Colbert's list (22). Others cited were texts by Barbauld, Charlotte Smith, Johnson, Bernadin de St. Pierre, Tasso, Priestley, Hestor Chapone, Hume, Blair, Price, Warton, Gregory, Aikin, Addison, Hayley, Gray, Pope, and Paley. It provides a most comprehensive list. From references made by Williams throughout her work it is evident that these are several of the books that she had read. His choice provides an insight into the reasoning common amongst those who were more supportive of women's education, but had differing views about the “ideal” product of the process.

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[64] The two Content pages beginning Darwin's A *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools*, (1797) and the catalogue of book in the final eight pages provide an indication of the curriculum he envisaged.

The Rational Dissenters were more supportive of companionate marriages than the more traditional views, and Darwin acknowledges the problems of the single life - both situations requiring more education for women. I have chosen to quote Darwin at some length since he provides advice that would have been thought "progressive," yet contains the traditional view of an ideal product of female education. Focusing on the purpose of educating girls, he suggests that:

> The advantages of a good education in uniting health and the agility of body with chearfulness and capacity of mind; in superadding graceful movements to the former, and agreeable tastes to the latter; and an acquirement of the rudiments of such arts and science, as may amuse themselves, or gain the esteem of others; and a strict attention to the culture of morality and religion. (10)

> The female character should possess the mild and retiring virtues rather than the bold and dazzling ones; great eminence in almost any thing is sometimes injurious to a young lady; whose temper and disposition should appear to be pliant rather than robust; to be ready to make impressions rather than to be decidedly mark'd; as great apparent strength of character, however excellent, is liable to alarm both her own and the other sex; and to create admiration rather than affection.
>
> There are however situations in single life in which, after the completion of their school-education, ladies may cultivate to any extent the fine arts of the sciences for their amusement or instruction. And there are situations in the married state; which may call forth all the energies of the mind in the care, education, or provision, for a family; which the inactivity, folly or death of a husband may render necessary. Hence it is to softness of manners, complacency of countenance, gentle unhurried motion, with a clear voice and yet tender, the charms which enchant all hearts! and be superadded internal strength and activity of mind, capable to transact the business or combat the evils of life; with a due sense of moral and religious obligation; all is obtain'd which education can supply; the female character becomes compleat, excites our love, and commands our respect. (*Female Education* 1797: 10-11)

It is for the boarding school education that Darwin provides his advice, although he presents a commonly held view of the ideal development of a woman's character. Several writers like David Williams and Charlotte Smith draw attention to the inadequacies of boarding school education. It had increased in the late eighteenth century in response to certain middle class attempts to improve the quality of a daughter's marriage prospects, or in acknowledgement of the increased partnership between husband and wife in commerce.

In *Letters for Literary Ladies* 1795, Maria Edgeworth expressed her approval of changes occurring in education when she noted:

> For a length of time the education was closed amongst subjects of vague and metaphysical speculation, but of late, it has attained its proper station in experimental philosophy. The sober sense of Locke and the enthusiastic eloquence of Rousseau have directed to this object the attention of philosophers and men of genius. (x)

Edgeworth contends that the result is that education was being viewed as a science (xi). She herself began to collect notes in 1776 hoping to later "lay before the public, as an experiment on the subject hitherto treated theoretically" (xii). Reasoning that "justice, truth and honesty are confined to no particular rank, and should be enforced with equal care and energy upon the minds of young people in every situation" (xii), she is content to leave to "politicians and the legislators" the decision about whether divisions in education should exist between "different ranks" (xiii).

Writing specifically on the purpose of educating women, Hannah More thought that the "chief end in cultivating the understanding of women, is to qualify them for the practical purpose of life" (*Strictures* II: 1). She believed that "their knowledge is not often like the learning of men, to be reproduced in some literary competition, nor in any learned profession; but is to be exhibited in life and manners" (2). She cites the importance of a "service" function for women noting that "the great uses of study to a woman are to enable her to be instrumental to the good of others." The examples of "conservative" sensibility involving care of family and community expressed by More and Darwin run counter to more radical proponents. Very different, more liberal perspectives on women's education in relation to that of men were expressed by Catharine Macaulay Graham and Mary Wollstonecraft. Their assumption of equality in the ability of men and women caused them to express their perceptions of the development of character for their roles as equal citizens. Macaulay believed that educating girls and boys together would help them to avoid the tyranny of passion in male-female relationships (*Letters on Education* 1790). In opposition to Rousseau's method of educating Emile, Wollstonecraft favours national education. She observes that a "man cannot retreat into the desert with his son," and "when children are confined to the society of men and women, they very soon acquire a kind of premature manhood which stops the growth of every major power of industry and body" (*Vindication* 1790: 273). She advocated national education believing like Macaulay that "public education of every denomination, should be directed to form citizens." (279) Both women believed that "were boys and girls permitted to pursue the same studies together . . . sexual distinctions which taint the mind" might be avoided (283). Wollstonecraft criticized the custom "of confining girls to their needle, and shutting them out of all political and civil employments" (288), suggesting that if woman are made "rational creatures and free citizens, and they will quickly become good wives and mothers . . ." (299). Williams also advocated a national system of education.[65]

While acknowledging that women should learn art, geography, natural philosophy, natural history, civil history, and languages, Laetitia Matilda Hawkins thought that the "male genius fetches to its treasures from the depth of science and the accumulated wisdom of the ages" whereas "a female finds hers in the lighter regions of fancy and the passing knowledge of the day" (*Letters* 1793). In her *Letters on the Female Mind* addressed specifically to Helen Williams, she indirectly criticizes Williams's education in her comment that "I am well aware that the influence of those to whose care we are consigned is too strong to be kept dormant and annihilated" (*Letters* II. Qtd. in Jones 120).

Hawkins's observation brings this survey of the innovations and controversy in mid to late eighteenth century education back to the early education of Williams, especially the influence on her of Kippis and other Rational dissenters. By including samples of opinions about the content, intent, and direction of education for both men and women in the milieu of Williams's formative years, I have attempted to show the views on women's education which must have affected her future perceptions. However, she was also exposed to the innovations introduced by professional educators in Rational Dissent of whom Kippis was an example of the more liberal-minded. Since there is so little direct evidence of Williams's experiences during the years between 1761 and 1781, it has been necessary to make inferences about those who influenced her based on evidence of those with whom she was in contact. Opinions and allusions she included in her later writing provide further proof of the type of liberal educational experiences and value system to which she had been exposed.

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[65] This is evident in her support of Condorcet's national system in 1791.

Williams acknowledged the majority eighteenth century assumption of female inferiority in such comments as "men assume over our sex so many claims to superiority." (*Letters* 1796: 118). She evidently had sufficient confidence in her knowledge and ability to project her opinions on political, religious, and social issues in numerous genre-varied publications. As a product of a society which assumed women's intellectual inferiority to be spiritually advocated, congenital, or as a result of inadequate education, Williams did not allow these views to curtail her political and literary involvement.

In the next chapter Williams's first publications of poetry between 1782 and 1788, and her novel in 1790 will be discussed and set within the context of the "culture of sensibility." As Gary Kelly has observed, she believed in the refining and emotive influence of her femininity in countering injustice, and attempted to draw attention to the unacknowledged strengths in women, which she primarily ascribed to their greater capacity for sensibility.

CHAPTER IV

Towards a *Sensible* Mind and Heart.

1782-1790

No cold exemption from her pain
I ever wish'd to know;
Cheer'd with her transport, I sustain
Without complaint her woe.

"To Sensibility" Helen Maria Williams *Poems* 1786

Ah! self-confounding sophists, will ye dare
Pronounce *that* joy which never touch'd the heart?
Does Education give the transport keen,
Or swell your vaunted grief? No, Nature feels
Most poignant, undefended; hails, with me
The Pow'rs of Sensibility untaught.

"Addressed to Sensibility" Ann Yearsley *Poems* 1787: 6

According to Jerome McGann, Ann Yearsley carried on the most extensive exploration of the "discourse of sensibility" among eighteenth century poets (1996: 55). Like Williams, who acknowledged the positive aspects of sensibility, she questioned the authenticity of thoughts which excluded evidence of a "feeling heart, the *cœur sensible*"[66] (4). Williams extends such an exploration to her prose. On occasions in her discourse, she pauses to stress the important role of feelings in facilitating understanding. In her poem "To Sensibility" (1786), Williams parallels Yearsley's later reflection when she acknowledges that the experience of sensibility is "untaught." Declaring her dedication to sensibility's power to create awareness of a range of feelings from joy to anguish, she observes that they are "feelings nature wrought so high / And gave in terms so dear" (*Poems* 1786: 66). She appears to have subscribed to the notion that "the aesthetic and moral senses posited by Shaftesbury[67] were like the other senses in their immediacy of perception, yet they performed functions formerly credited to reason" (Jones 20).

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[66] With regard to the "feeling heart", in the Preface to her translation of Alexander Humboldt's travels in South America, Williams observes: "Happy the traveller, with whom the study of Nature has not been merely the cold research of the understanding, in the explanation of her properties, or the solution of her problems! who, while he has interpreted her laws, has adored her sublimity, and followed her steps with passionate enthusiasm, amidst that solemn and stupendous scenery, . . . where she speaks in a voice so well understood by the mysterious sympathy of the *feeling heart*""(vi-vii).

In "Storms of Sorrow," Deborah Kennedy asserts that "sensibility was not just a poetic fashion," [for Williams] but a life-long creed that formed an important part of her liberal Protestant faith. Even though Dissenters such as Williams "prized rationality and the empirical pursuit of knowledge, the current philosophical interest in emotions and morals was relevant to their own fight for individual liberty and religious freedom" (1991: 81). Sensibility was an attribute of sensation which Locke's theories, which were so influential in the education of Dissent, had projected to temper the dependence on reason in the perceptions of Enlightenment culture. In his *Essay* (1690) he suggested that to previously accepted forms of knowledge could be added "intuitive, demonstrative, and sensitive; in each of which there are different degrees and ways of evidence and certainty" (II: 14, 327). Locke believed sensation "objectively conveyed valid knowledge and for him reflection had an abstract universal quality. Ideas were bound to differ, but experiment and reflection could expose wrong associations of ideas, and chains of reasoning formed converging subjective paths towards objective reasoning" (Hampson 98). McGann reflects on the contribution of the poetry of sensibility and sentiment to an acknowledgement of such theories. He notes that it "brought a revolution to poetic style by arguing that the traditional view of mind and reason would no longer serve a truly reasonable--in eighteenth century terms--a *sensible* mind" (5).

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[67] Shaftesbury, whose work remained current to the end of the century (Jones 16), argued for "equality and naturalness . . . but his formulations became the basis of a radical, even revolutionary ideology" (Jones 8).

Williams's poetry from 1781 to 1788 will provide the parameters for the following chapter. Within this context is my assessment of Williams in relation to the eighteenth century culture of Sensibility filtered through Dissent. I contend that Williams's method of presenting her discourse whether in poetry or prose is informed by various techniques intended to evoke response to, and empathy with, her experiences and opinions in order to persuade her readers to consider her social and political perspectives. Gary Kelly has observed that the "cultural project of the Enlightenment and Sensibility" was to "redefine the individual and society in ways different from what were thought to be the definitions and practices of the power holding or hegemonic classes, the aristocracy and the gentry" (1989: 13). Emerging from the milieu of bourgeois Rational Dissent, Williams projected her thoughts about the need for social and political restructuring following that initiated by the mentors of her formative years. Her poetry from 1782 to 1788 challenged the right of those in control, the hegemonic classes, to continue colonial aggression and enslavement of certain groups. These expressions of the conservative, political mode were criticized and opposed by radicals of her acquaintance. Her later continuation of this challenge to the traditionalist order in her prose of the 1790s expresses her ongoing concern about the need for increased civil liberty. Her style is also indicative of her involvement in the movement to "redefine the individual and society."

In both her language and physical responses to her experiences, Williams confesses subjectivity, and intensity of feeling and indicates an appreciation of its projection by others. An example of this appears in *Letters* (1792), when she comments on the style of Pastor Marron who, she observes, preached "with the most persuasive eloquence" (185). She expresses the wish that "English clergy would sometimes address their discourses to feeling, as well as the understanding. It is not the reasoning but the sentimental part of religion that softens every evil to which humanity is subject" (185-6). She also remarks of a lecturer at the Lycée: "I can feel the charms of eloquence, and therefore find the chemistry, when taught by Mons. Fourcroy, is the most engaging, the most enchanting science in the world" (131). Through metaphor and other devices of descriptive style and the location of her subjects e.g., the contemplation of suicide by a slave with her child on a slave ship in her anti-slave trade poem (1788), Williams appeals to her readers' feelings through "a language of affective meanings" (McGann 6).

In his assessment of the poetry of sensibility/sentiment, McGann presents an analysis of only one aspect of Williams's style. He focuses on her use of annotations to provide a means of "teasing us (its subsequent readers) into further ranges of sympathetic response (for instance, speculative reflections upon, or even active researches into the 'meaning' of the annotations)" (139). He perceives the sonnets which she added throughout her translation of *Paul et Virginie*, to be annotations which provide a "running commentary on Bernadin's work" (139). Reflection on Williams's style in her prose commentaries, in relation to McGann's assessment, which are the focus of the study of her post 1790 work, reminded me that throughout those she attempts to evoke an empathic response through anecdotes and opinions which punctuate her accounts.

Since I assert that Williams's use of the evocative devices of the culture of Sensibility pervades her work, I wish to contend that her use of anecdotal comment and opinions appear to serve a similar function as the poetic annotations cited by McGann. The evidence for such major themes in her discourse as liberty, sensibility, and the role of women are primarily revealed by her reflections, which she injects at intervals into her texts. In addition to this persuasive device, her adoption of the intimate epistolary style for most of her commentaries parallels the intimacy and immediacy of poetic emotive appeal. At times when her emotional engagement with her surroundings or reflections is intensified, she exhibits a tendency to "spontaneous overflow"[68] (43) in her rhetoric. This is a characteristic McGann ascribes to the language of sensibility.

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[68] Alexander Humboldt observes that: "When the feelings and the imagination are excited, the style is apt to stray into poetical prose" (*Views* Preface).

For example, writing of the "sublime scenery of nature" preserved in part of the Tuilleries, she quotes a verse of poetry and follows it with the comment: "What powerful sensations does the first view of such a scene produce! – We seem to begin a new existence – every former impression is for a while erased from the memory, and the mind feels enwrapped and lost in the strong emotions of awe, astonishment and admiration" (*Letters* 1792: 158-9). It is the manner in which Williams alludes to "sensations" as in her recollection of the "sublime" in nature that illustrate her absorption of and ascription to, the sensationalist theories of Locke.

In observing the shift caused by this aspect of Locke's theories, McGann comments that it is "observable at its most dramatic" in the Socinian connection (14). This aspect is relevant to the fact that, as indicated in the Chapter III, an important influence on Williams was Andrew Kippis, who "approached in his latter days (the sentiments) of modern Socinians, or Unitarians" (Rees *Gentleman's Magazine* LXV: October 1795). In support of the degree to which the sensationalist philosophy would have pervaded Williams's formative years, McGann's comment about Priestley, a fellow Unitarian/Socinian is insightful since the shift was particularly evident in his thought. His *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* (1777) "collapses the distinction between matter and spirit and argues inherent materiality of consciousness." Priestley's position follows upon his view "that 'matter is not *impenetrable*' but that it is 'endued with powers of attraction and repulsion taking place at different distances'. . . .Once matter is no longer seen as solid and impervious, it becomes no more 'incompatible with sensation and thought than that substance . . . we have been used to call immaterial" (14-15). In this context McGann observes that Pope "was no Socinian, least of all a friend to enlightened women, but even so traditional a work as *An Essay on Man* shows the upheaval that Locke's ideas were diffusing through culture" (15). McGann's assertion further strengthens the argument for the pervasive cultural changes alluded to in the first pages of this chapter.

Although "literary epiphany" was first ascribed to nineteenth century writings of Wordsworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Carlyle (Bidney 1997:117), I believe there is an indication of it in Williams's discourse, if Martin Bidney's analysis is accepted. Bidney considers the terms "epiphany" and "reverie . . . for practical purposes equivalent" (15), although Gaston Bachelard (1971) used epiphanies "to investigate what he called reveries" (5). Bidney indicates that epiphanic episodes are not the results of "direct statements of knowledge aimed at in a rational straightforward manner," but possess the "intensity criterion . . . crucial to any description of literary epiphany" (13). Three criteria are indicated in Aston Nichols (1987) *Poetics of Epiphany*: "expansiveness, (a)temporality and mysteriousness" (28). Bidney replaces (a)temporality with "intensity" (3). I detect elements of the "patterns of epiphany," which Bidney asserts, not only in Williams's poetry, but also in her prose. This is especially evident when she touches on the issue of "liberty" e.g., "liberty seemed to have run like electric fire along the country, and pervaded every object in its passage . . . people are free whenever with one sublime sentiment they determine to be so" (*Letters*: 1792: 10[69].

Beyond extending McGann's analysis of Williams's use of poetic annotations as a device indicative of sensibility, I also detected an attitude of mind intrinsic to its culture which he ascribes to Williams and which I believe can be applied to her later prose discourse. He observes that as a result of the sentiments expressed in the sonnets, Williams adds another dimension to an interpretation of Bernadin's narrative. The reader is "moved by desire towards an ever-receding horizon of an ultimate meaning (whether particular or general). But all that one generates is translation, the extension of meaning defined through its continual loss" (141). Yet the melancholy . . . signals only a loss of meaning not of a loss of vitality" (142). McGann attributes this analysis to "dead, (in) human forms (words, images, ideas) that reflect, by their own emptiness, the life they are forever losing" (142). Contending that a major concern of Williams was to inform about the virtues of civil liberty, I believe that an analogy may be drawn between the use of this particular concept and the "ideas," and "images" it generates to stimulate a response, and the aspect McGann identifies as "creation-as-energy and its social equivalent, sympathy, . . . proved through the structure of emotional response" (136). Williams's identification with the term "Liberty" was emotionally-charged to the point where on occasion its mention is followed, or incorporated, into rhapsodic statements concerning its virtue and future location in society. One of many such examples is her comment: "liberty is innocent" and voices from the grave call "with a warning voice to watch over the liberties of their country" (*Letters* 1796: 284).

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[69] More evident "epiphanies" occur in Williams's Swiss travels e.g., when she is viewing the falls on the Rhine near Schauffhausen, described in Chapter VII of this study.

Throughout her political commentaries of 1790 to 1827, she never loses sight of her hope, her "dream" that eventually--beyond her lifetime--a moral force based on reason keeping liberty within "*justes*" limits (*Souvenirs* 200) will prevail. Like Mme de la Tour in Bernadin's narrative, she experienced sorrows "to be followed by further and worse, for to live (in the world through the heart) is to be poured out and emptied" (McGann: 141). She indicates this in her hymn cited by Deborah Kennedy who asserts in "Storms of Sorrow" (1991: 81) that "While Thee I seek Protecting Power" (*Poems* I: 97-99) is not an example of the "excesses of the literature of sensibility," but "promotes spiritual fortitude not emotional excess" (81).

In other comments regarding Yearsley's "Address to Sensibility," McGann presents the interpretation that " if Education is not the source of Sensibility, it is, for Yearsley, its (paradoxically) clarifying medium" (60). I would add that there is an aspect of Humean innate moral sense in her expression as in that of Williams implying that sensibility is not learnt, but is inherent in differing degrees. The differentiation determines the sensitivity of a person to the feelings of others. In "To Sensibility," Williams reflects thankfully on her ability to feel as intensely, as exquisitely, as she does, but in her "Sonnet on Peace of Mind" regrets that later in life she may "no more [experience] the fruitless tear she loves to shed" (*Poems* 1786). William Cowper criticizes Lady Greville for desiring indifference. Williams's comments in her "To

Sensibility" suggest that she would have agreed with him.[70]

Williams's capacity to empathize, to feel for others beyond a preoccupation with her own feelings, in the manner of Yearsley,[71] placed her in the milieu of radical sensibility which pervades the culture of Rational Dissent that stressed the need for a responsible social and moral conscience. In her earliest poetry, Williams's attempts to evoke sympathy for victims of aggression and slavery demonstrate the importance she attached to a social sensibility. She asserted that from a young age she was accustomed to being concerned about humanitarian issues (*Souvenirs* 4). This reflection serves to strengthen the contention that it was in the Dissenting culture of her formative years that the characteristics of her later expression originated.

Williams's Experience of the Milieu of Sensibility

In the 1780s when her poems were first published, Williams attended the salons of female intellectuals such as Elizabeth Montagu, who encouraged Williams to publish as she had advised others like Yearsley. Williams's second publication, *Ode on the Peace* (1783), was dedicated to Montagu. Although caught up like other literary females in "things calculated to excite emotion and feeling when they should reason" (Wollstonecraft *Vindication*), there is little doubt that due to the nature of her educational background, Williams tempered her expressions of sensibility with reason. She utilized the contemporary literary mode of sensibility with its appeal to the emotions to draw her readers into a heightened awareness of the plight of oppressed groups. Also, she questioned and commented with an intent like that of her contemporary, William Blake, whom she may have met within the circle of Joseph Johnson, the London publisher. In "Songs of Innocence and Experience," he questioned: "Can I see another's woe, / And not be in sorrow too, / Can I see another's grief, / And not seek for kind relief. / Can I see a falling tear, / And not feel my sorrows share" (1994: 27).

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[70] Jones observes that "there was an irritating sense of elitism among some predominantly liberal writers" (67) like Cowper.

[71] Jonathan Wordsworth observes that Yearsley (1752-1806) "cared for individuals, not causes" (*Revolution and Romanticism1789-1834* Introduction).

Williams's references in poems and prose to neo-classical Augustan poets such as Milton, Spenser, Gray, Thomson, Ossian/Macpherson, Blair, and Warton show her identification with their emotional appeal. Punctuating her writings are quotations from Macpherson's Ossian[72]. Comments by Hugh Blair in his dissertation on Ossian are reflected in her discourse. His observations regarding sensibility echo through some of Williams's writing and given her obvious interest in Ossian, there is little doubt that she would have read Blair's Dissertation of 1765, and the works he ascribed to Ossian. From her comments, it would seem that she remained unconcerned about her contemporaries' concern about their lack of authenticity[73]. He notes the "tenderness, and even delicacy of sentiment . . ." (17) and the manner in which a consideration of the text of Ossian elevates the reader "with the highest ideas of magnanimity, generosity, and true heroism." Also how it opens up "beauties" of imagery to "every reader who is capable of sensibility," especially "those who have the highest degree of it "(18). Jones comments that Wollstonecraft made a distinction between herself and the "ability of other superior beings who create sublime visions" (67) and the common female sensibility.

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[72] In his 1996 Introduction to Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), E.J.Clery notes: "Issues of Scottish nationalism were an important factor in the 'Ossian' phenomenon, but the fraud itself was in large part a product of two conflicting pressures: on the one hand a growing enthusiasm for the superstitious fancies of the past; and on the other, a sense that the kind of imaginative freedom was forbidden, or simply impossible, for writers of the enlightened present" (x-xi).

The Culture of Sensibility

As observed in Chapter II, Williams's discourse emerged from the culture of Sensibility. In *Sensibility, An Introduction*, Janet Todd asserts that Addison, whom Williams admired (*Poems* 1786), employed sensibility "to suggest delicate emotional and physical susceptibility," and "the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refined emotions and quickness to display compassion for suffering" (1986: 7). To provide further empirical evidence of Williams's position among the writers from the culture of Sensibility, I have chosen to present an indication of evidence of it in the writing of several of her contemporaries, William Cowper, Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft and Charlotte Smith.

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[73] When attempting to assess Napoleon's character, Williams was favorably impressed by his interest in Ossian until she realized that he probably read the text only for the descriptive scenes of war (*Narrative* 5).

While presenting an assessment of the commonality among poets of sensibility in their response to John Locke, and their " heightening of sentiment," Stephen Clark observes that Cowper provided the "culmination of the poetry of sensibility," and Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard the initiation of it" (1995: 35). Before attempting to further position Williams within the Sensibility movement, I should indicate my disagreement with Clark's comment that among such poets' responses to Locke, "[n]othing seems to lie behind the writing" (60), since they are caught in a dialogue with "the 'Void' of the *tabula rasa*, the 'inlets' of the senses, and the ubiquitous 'idea'" as minds shaped by Locke's *Essay*. The commonality which lies behind the writing of the poets of sensibility whatever their theological stance or lack of one, is the belief that humanity is elevated in all sensations by the "gift" of sensibility. Their focus on the areas of sensation and the degrees of its influence, of course, varies.

Apart from her exposure to Locke's theories, Williams would also have been aware of the moral sense theories of Hume, and the philosophies of Hutcheson and Hartley. Although acknowledging moral distinctions, Hume wished to expose the limitations of reason and believed that judgements were determined only in human sentiment. Influenced by Hume, Hutcheson was the principle advocate of the "moral sense" theory originally developed by Shaftesbury. Hutcheson emphasized feeling and intuition rather than reason as the source of moral knowledge. David Hartley attempted to provide a physiological explanation for the persistence of a feeling even after the cause of it had been removed, and he was particularly interested in the element of the physical in the production and association of ideas. It is this latter aspect to which Mary Wollstonecraft was to draw attention in her criticism of women's education (*Vindication* 273). It is possible to provide evidence of Williams's awareness and agreement with Hume and Hutcheson's ideas from her comment: "Liberty is, like the moral sense, an attribute of our race"[74] (*Events*1819: 182-3).

Cowper also writes of the attribute causing the sensitivity to feel, "the most refined" of all the "raptures" as imparted by "bounteous heaven" ("Address" 1742: 37). Since he implies caution against blunting "the sense / Mankind received from heaven" i.e., sensibility, which he considers ordained by the "Sovereign Author," it would seem that he is suggesting humanity accept responsibility for it, and nurture it as a refining process. Like Williams he insists on the need to appreciate the ability to feel intensely, and the need to realize that to experience the extreme of joy, one needs also to accept the other extreme of the misery of grief. In citing Lady Frances Greville's craving in her "Prayer for Indifference" to avoid emotional pain, he suggests she should "form a better prayer" (136).

In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft maintains that women's "hearts are really more sensible to general benevolence, more alive to the sentiments that civilize life" but that generally, because of ideas inculcated in youth and from inadequate education, they lack "a due proportion of reflection and self-governance," (160)--despite the fact that they are the equals of men. Observations in *The Wrongs of*

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[74] By "race" Williams implies humanity. She prefaces this with the observation that "every human being may aspire to the dignity of being free" (*Events* 182-3).

Women project her perspective on sensibility through the character of Jemima, the nurse to the protagonist who has been wrongly incarcerated in a mental asylum. Reflecting on the way in which Jemima's character has been shaped by her experiences and environment, which have blunted her sensibility, Wollstonecraft muses:

> A sense of right seems to result from the simplest act of reason and to preside over the faculties of the mind, like the master sense of feeling, to rectify the rest; but (for the comparison may be carried still farther) how often is the exquisite sensibility of both weakened or destroyed by the vulgar occupations, and ignoble pleasures of life? (1976: 80)

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Ann Radcliffe warns of the problems of sensibility as projected by the father of the main character, Emily. He observes: "though I would guard you against the dangers of sensibility, I am not an advocate for apathy. At your age I should have said *that* is a vice because it leads to positive evil; in this however it does no more than an ill-governed sensibility . . . Sentiment is a disgrace, instead of an ornament, unless it lead us to good actions" (1966: 80). Much later in the novel, Emily in part reflects his concern noting, "I would not boast of sensibility – a quality, perhaps, more to be feared than desired"(281). Radcliffe's comment shows a different perspective from that of Williams who wished to know "no exemption from her pain" ("To Sensibility" 1786: 61).

Indicating the parallels between Williams's *Letters from France in the Summer of 1790* and Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*, (1792) Antje Blank and Janet Todd draw attention to the "inset of the Revolution Controversy into the plot of sensibility" (xxx). They also observe that Williams had always insisted that "her love of the French

Revolution was a natural result of her feminine sensibility" (xxxi). In the following chapter of my study, I trace the manner in which Williams's "radical" sensibility was informed by her adherence to the issue of civil liberty which had pervaded her political heritage from her background in Rational Dissent. Her Humean moral sensibility, her belief in the perfectibility of humanity, and her libertarian heritage served to strengthen her confidence--throughout the turbulent years of her commentaries on the various stages of the French revolutions in government--in the concept of "liberty" and all that it connoted for civil society. She put her sensibility into action in the manner alluded to by Radcliffe's concerned father in the *Mysteries of Udolpho*. In this respect she was unlike Mary Hays who complained:

> I have not the talents for a reformer of the world, I have still many shrinking delicacies and female foibles, that unfit me for rising to arduous heights . . . Where, then shall I find this object to call forth my exertions, and preserve me from languor and apathy? (Ty 1996 xv)

Williams derided apathy and whether in her early publications of poetry, or in later prose, she seemed to have found the "object to call forth [her] exertions" in her humanitarian concern bolstered by her sensibility.

Evidence of the Theme and Style of Sensibility 1782-1786

Williams's two-volume collection of poems in 1786 included her poem *To Sensibility*. Apart from asserting its "untaught" aspect, she acknowledges that sensibility "knows the price of every sigh, / the value of a tear" (62). Also that it is the source of "every finer bliss," although allowing the sharing of each "pang felt by someone's mourning," and causing the shedding of "tears over nature," the languishing experienced after the death of a loved one, and wounding "by some vulgar mind / Unconscious of the deed" (64-5). Opposed to sensibility is indifference of which she asks: "who would hard Indifference choose, / Whose breast no tears can steep? / Who, for apathy, would lose / The sacred power to weep?" (66). A choice to cultivate indifference, "that envied ease thy heart would prove / Were sure too deeply bought / With friendship, sympathy and love / And every finer thought" (66). To Williams, the trait of sensibility did not suggest weakness of character, or feminine inferiority in intellectual and physical stamina, but a strength to be appreciated in everyone, male or female since it presupposed a concern for the problems of all humanity and reduced aggression and its resultant strife. Her choice of themes and the responses of her characters within her poems reinforce her perception of the value of sensibility. The "sacred power to weep" is always present in her protagonists, and a reference to this trait may be found in most of the poems of the first volume.

Between "An American Tale," the first poem in volume one, to the exegetical writing at its conclusion, Williams provides more evidence of her perception of the higher order worth of sensitivity /sensibility as she defines it. Apart from her "Sonnet to Mrs. Bates," and a "Sonnet to Twilight" and "A Song," she includes a revised version of her already successful "Edwin and Eltruda" (1782), and "Ode on the Peace" (1783). The purpose of the latter was to congratulate the English government on the end of hostilities with the American colonies. "The American Tale" that opens the collection makes clear her desire to focus attention on the domestic strife and the devastation visited upon a family by war. She cites one example of the imprisonment of a Briton, its effect on his daughter, and the compassion shown by their "enemy." Her intent is evidently to draw on the sympathy of her readers, encouraging them to imagine the results of aggression and, and juxtaposing it to the effects of the greater security of peacetime.

Following "To Sensibility," is "Edwin and Eltruda" in which again the setting is war, this time civil war during the Wars of the Roses. As in the "American Tale," the characters are a father, and a young man and woman. The latter are his son and future daughter-in-law. The horrors of civil war become evident when the characters are caught up in the terror of "civil discord," and deprived of "[d]omestic bliss, unvex'd by strife"(69). In this poem, there is a verse similar to aspects of Wordsworth's later "Lucy," in which he reflects on his subject as having been like a "violet by a mossy stone / half hidden from the eye!" who "lived unknown . . ." (*Poems* 1992: 412), and Thomas Gray's early allusion to a woman "born to blush unseen" (329). Williams writes of Eltruda:

> So lives in solitude, unseen
> This lovely, peerless maid;
> So graceful the wild, sequester'd scene
> And blossomed in the shade. (66)

With respect to Wordsworth and given Williams's stress on the manifestation of tears as a sign of sensibility, it is relevant to note that his first published sonnet is thought to have been: "On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress." The sonnet was first published under the pseudonym, "Axiologus."

Wordsworth was sixteen at the time. He writes:

> She wept, -- Life's purple tide began to flow
> In languid streams through every thrilling vein;
> Dim were my swimming eyes -- my pulse beat slow,
> And my full heart was swell'd to dear delicious pain.
> Life left my loaded heart, and closing eye;
> A sigh recall'd the wanderer to my breast;
> Dear was the pause of life, and dear the sigh
> That call'd the wanderer home, and home to rest.
> That tear proclaims – in thee each virtue dwells,
> And bright will shine in misery's midnight hour;
> As the soft star of dewy evening tells
> What radiant fires were drown'd by day's malignant pow'r,
> That only want the darkness of the night
> To cheer the wand'ring wretch with hospitable light.
> (*European Magazine* March 1787: 202)

It indicates the extent to which the sensibility apparent in her work affected him while he was yet a student. It is a matter of speculation as to whether Wordsworth met, or saw her in the mid-1780s. According to one of his biographers, Hunter Davies, he was a "fan of hers." Indeed Wordsworth may have written the sonnet in his last year in Hawkeshead School before going up to Cambridge and he sought letters of introduction to her when he went to France in 1790. However, it was not until 1820 that they met in France. Marshall Brown, writing an intellectual historical study *Preromanticism* in 1991, comments that Williams was Wordsworth's "earliest poetic model" (Brown 439).

To identify the tears motif is to provide evidence of her attention to the physiological manifestation of sensibility and its " sacred nature." It may be traced in most of her early poetry. Of Mrs. Bates, she notes that she could thrill with pity and "turned to sympathy [her] faithful tear" (16). In the poem expressing her preference for twilight, a poem apparently much praised by Wordsworth (Woodward 19), she observes of the early evening that, "[s]he wakes the tear 'tis luxury to shed." William repeats the standard tropes of sensibility, but her writing is distinctive in that it provides a foretaste of the humanitarian themes and her radical tendencies in social and political issues that were to become increasingly evident in her prose after 1790. Also it provides an indication of her perspective on sensibility which, as noted earlier, determined her emotional and intellectual involvement in the French Revolution.

The problems created for families by oppression that she recounted in poetry about characters like *Edwin and Eltruda*, and those in "The American Tale" entered reality for her when she became acquainted with the du Fossé family around 1786. An interest in their difficulties arising from the autocratic feudal system in France first prompted her to engage more actively in humanitarian issues on which she had previously only speculated in verse. Her sensibility caused her to sympathize with the problems they experienced. When the Revolution brought a happy resolution to the situation, Williams's fascination with the possibilities of political change in France caused her to become further involved.

Williams and the Anti- Slavery Movement

Following the theme of the devastation caused by war in her early poetry, Williams next turned her attention to the anti-slavery movement. During the 1780s many women writers produced poems critical of the slave trade. In 1788 Williams published her *Poem on the Bill lately passed for regulating the Slave Trade*. Its creation followed the revival production of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* [1688] in Manchester in 1787. Together with several poets, Williams contributed to raising public awareness about the horrors of slavery. Ann Yearsley also produced "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade,"(1788) in which she attacked the support given to the trade by Bristol, by "Custom," and "Law," which she described as "blessings and . . . curses of mankind." Like Williams, she condemns the avarice that created and perpetuated the trafficking in humanity, and appeals to those who feel more than "cold, material essence." In her extensive analysis of the British campaign against slavery, 1780-1870, Claire Midgeley records the extent of female involvement.

Abolitionist poems and writings by women were encouraged by the male reformers in the late eighteenth century and Williams's poem was popular. A letter from Robert Burns in December of 1787 indicates that she had sent him a copy of her poem for his comments. After making apologies for knowing little about "scientific criticism," he promises to note passages that strike him as "being uncommonly beautiful, and where the expression seems to be perplexed and faulty" (Currie 1839: 31). The editor of *Edinburgh Magazine*, Thomas Pringle, noted in September 1817:

> The critique (of Williams's poem) though not without some traits of his usual sound judgment and discrimination, appears to be much in the strain of those gallant and flattering responses which men of genius usually find it incumbent to issue when consulted upon the productions of their female admirers. (Qtd. by Currie 1839: 31)

Burns acknowledged that the published poems of Williams, which he had obtained in 1787, "for several reasons, some belonging to the head, and others the offspring of the heart" gave him "a great deal of pleasure." He noted "two characteristic features in her poetry--the unfettered wild flight of native genius, and the querulous, sombre tenderness of 'time-settled sorrow'"[75] (Currie 19). In the summer of 1789, in a letter complementing her "on her excellent poem on the slave-trade" and wishing her well in her "progress in the path of fame," Burns cautions her of the dangers of "stumbling through incautious speed, or losing ground through neglect" (55).

The letters between Burns and Williams provide an indication of her confidence and his assessment of her writing. However, the correspondence also provides a valuable insight into Williams's belief in the interconnection between intellect and feeling. She suggests that its most "valuable property is its power of disengaging the mind from worldly cares, and leading the imagination to the richest springs of intellectual enjoyment" (55). Unintentionally foreshadowing her disillusioning experiences during the Revolution, she reminds him that "however frequently life may be chequered with gloomy scenes, those who truly love the muse can always find one little path adorned by flowers and cheered by sunshine" (55). At times of "spontaneous overflow" (McGann 43) in her prose responses, Williams employs figurative language more commonly used in poetry acknowledging a closer connection between intellect and feeling than was usual in social and political commentary.

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[75] Burns in a letter to Dr. Moore Edinburgh, 15 February, 1787. Qtd. by James Currie in *The Prose Works of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, 1839: 19).

Williams's nearly three hundred-line anti-slavery poem[76] appeals to the imagination of her readers on a serious issue. Citing a particular incident possible in the course of the slave transport, she attempts to evoke through her readers' sensibility, their sense of justice. She records her delight in the "consenting minds" of those who had made the Bill possible, the consent in all but "those whom av'rice binds / Who creep in interest's crooked ways" or "those whom hard indiff'rence steels / To every pang another feels." Here again she returns to the theme of her earlier poem on sensibility. Throughout the poem she makes reference to the effect of the slave trade on women and children as well as men. In the opening lines she writes of the "hopeless chains" of the captives of a slave ship, created by "Man! Who to Afric's shore has past / Relentless, as an annual blast that flings / Destruction from its furious wings." The images she conjures present the horror felt by a mother enslaved, "the galling chain," the "vast accumulated pain . . . in desperation wild," and her suicide clutching a child and sinking to "agonizing death."

With such imagery, Williams juxtaposes her praise for Britain for its passing of a decree regulated the trade, that "soothes despair," being the first of European countries to "ease the captive's iron bands." In keeping with sensibility she personifies Britain as a person who "dares to feel." She hints at the commercial reasons for the traffic in people for goods desired by the rich and avaricious, then conjures imagery associated with slavery of "the shackled limbs," "the fury of contagion," and "despair," and expresses outrage at the presumption of "guilty man" to "Load with offence his fleeting span . . ." and "deform creation." She calls attention to the demoralization and misery caused by slavery to those "whom the traffic of their race / Has robbed of every human grace." Such a fate also, she observes, is visited on those occupied in the trafficking. In the course of the experience they become without what she considers a "sacred sense" of feeling, of sensibility, which she insisted was divinely gifted. She provides a reminder of the responsibility of humankind to such a gift, and asks her reader to consider "Does avarice, your god, delight?" or is the essence of bliss to be found in gold. She appeals for eloquence in those able to change the laws, and for people to feel noble rage. In conclusion, she returns to her introductory thoughts reflecting on the anguish and hopelessness that brought the death alluded to at the beginning of the poem. This she juxtaposes with acclamation of Britain whom she hopes will teach other nations "to make all nature free."

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[76] The references to Williams's anti-slavery poem are from *English Poetry* Full Text Database:Chadwyck-Healey Ltd. (1995).

William's poem on the slave trade was published two years after Thomas Clarkson's essay in response to the question posed for a Latin prize in 1785, "Is it right to make slaves of others against their will?" It was published the following year and since it was widely read, it is probable that Williams had access to it. Given her beliefs in individual liberty, she would certainly have concurred with Hutcheson's sentiments in *System of Moral Philosophy* that Clarkson cites in his 1808 *History of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade* by the British Parliament:

> Strange it is in any nation where a sense of liberty prevails, and where the Christian religion is professed, custom and high prospect of gain can so stupify the consciousness of men and all sense of natural justice, that they can hear such computations made about the value of their fellow-men and their liberty without abhorrence and indignation. (*History* 1808: 43) [77]

Early Evidence of the Theme of Liberty in Williams's Writing

Another theme that begins to surface in Williams's early poems, and is particularly evident in her anti-slavery poem, concerns her perceptions of the importance of "liberty." Janet Todd has observed that the Dissenters' "libertarian concerns were reinforced by the sentimental interest in the deprived. The most famous "Dissenting divines rarely wrote sentimental literature, but they were certainly its consumers and encouraged many to produce it" (*Sensibility* 81). As I have noted earlier in this chapter, it was Williams's sensibility together with the influence of libertarian thinkers like Kippis, Priestley, and Price, which prompted her opposition to any form of oppression.

In the 1780s, her poetry addressed a variety of issues which limited civil liberty including colonial aggression by the British in North America, (*Ode on the Peace*, 1783); by the Spanish in South America, (*Peru*, 1784) and her poem on the slave trade in 1788. The rational Dissenters opposed aggression against other countries, and supported only defensive war, and action to remove oppressive feudal political systems. The concept of "Liberty" as Williams would have perceived it was of the type contained in contemporary pamphlets, treatises and articles which provided elucidation of libertarian thought.

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[77] The Quakers were the first group to publicly oppose it in the late seventeenth century (Klingberg 33).

In *Cato's Letters* by John Trenchant and Thomas Gordon appears an observation (February 1721) which reflects Williams's comments about peace in her 1783 poem. The article specifically concerns liberty as an adjunct to peace. The authors note:

> Having already shown that Naval Trade and Power cannot subsist but in free countries alone, I will now shew, that the same is true of domestic Arts and Sciences; and that both these, and the Population, which is their constant Concomitant, and their chief Cause as well as their certain Effect, are born of Liberty, and nursed, educated, encouraged and endowed by Liberty alone[78].

In her *Ode to the Peace*, Williams makes clear the connection between the flourishing of the arts, sciences and commerce and a cessation of international aggression. In *Souvenirs*, noting the importance of "liberty," she acknowledges:

> *rien n'a été plus constant que les opinions de mon propre cœur, si fidélité inébranable à la cause de la liberté, ou, en d'autres termes, à la cause de l'espèce humaine* (3). (Nothing has been a more consistent concern of true feelings, of my heart, than an immovable faith in the cause of liberty, or in other words, the cause of humanity.)

From my understanding formed from a reading of her work and from other sources on theories concerning liberty during the eighteenth century, I would suggest that the definitions which most closely accord with her inferences are definitions like those provided by the writings of John Trenchant and Thomas Gordon. These were apparently a more popular source of political ideas in the 1770s than Locke's *Civil Government*. According to David Jacobson, John Adams made reference to this in 1816 (Jacobson xvii). A series of letters appeared in *The London Journal* in the late 1720s over the signature of "Cato." They were intended to reflect the virtues and notions of liberty, and the justice of tyrannicide associated with the name of the "Great Cato" (xxv). Williams's education evidently included the reading of Roman and Greek mythology, political history and theory, since throughout her writing she alludes to characters and ideas from the classical past, ideas no doubt also culled from the neo-classical Augustan writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Williams made several references to the danger of despotism and tyranny, as for example in *Souvenirs* when she notes that "*le secret de la tyrannie, est l'ignorance*" [The secret of tyranny is ignorance] (12). One of *Cato's Letters*, March 21 1722, contains the following similar sentiments:

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[78] *English Libertarian Heritage* (172).

> Ignorance accompanies Slavery, and is introduced by it. People who live in Freedom will think with Freedom; but when the mind is enslaved in Fear and the Body in Chains, Inquiry and Study will be at an End. (189)

Providing a contemporary definition of liberty is a part of one of the letters of 1721 in which the writer observes:

> By Liberty, I understand the Power which every Man has over his own Actions, and his Right to enjoy the Fruit of his Labour, Art, and Industry, as far as by it he hurts not Society, or any Members of it, by taking from any Member, or by hindering him from enjoying what he himself enjoys . . . I Go on with my Consideration upon Liberty, to show that all Civil Virtue and Happiness, every moral Excellency, all Politeness, all good Arts and Sciences, are produced by Liberty; and that all Wickedness, Baseness, and Misery, are immediately and necessarily produced by tyranny. (127)

Williams's contribution to the French revolutionary movements against different types of despotism that limited "Liberty" will be the focus of Chapter V. In the 1780s, reform movements in Britain provided inspiration for her poetry. As earlier observed, she connects this trait with a more just, liberal social structure, and it is possible to see the evolution of her thoughts on reform which eventually projected her into the volatile, politically confirming and then disillusioning experience of the French Revolution.

Williams's Early Experiences of London Literary Society

Although this is a study that traces the evolution of Williams's thought and commentary, I have tried to introduce her "voice" and her persona, not only as it is further revealed in her published writing, but also from her personal correspondence, and from the comments of her contemporaries. Glimpses of her social milieu enable an assessment of influences from the years following her childhood and adolescence. A survey of the currently limited evidence[79] of the social context in which Williams wrote her first published works provides evidence of experiences that shaped her thought and responses.

The early months of 1782 found Williams in London being introduced to the reading public though the preface by Dr. Andrew Kippis to her legendary tale of *Edwin*

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[79] Very few of Williams's personal letters are yet available, but there is evidence that an extensive correspondence once existed.

and Eltruda. In the *Record of Unitarian Worthies*, Spears suggests that it was the success of the poem which brought the Williams' family to London. According to Woodward, Helen was soon introduced to "*un cercle littéraire choisi qui appréciait pleinement les rares talents et [son] bel esprit* . . ." [a literary circle who fully appreciated her rare talents and her charming spirit] (Woodward 14-15).

By 1783, Williams was part of the circle of female writers at the salon of Elizabeth Montagu, (1720-1800) author of an *Essay on the Writings and Genius of William Shakespeare* (1769) written in response to an attack by Voltaire (15). Disparaged by Samuel Johnson, Montagu's work was praised by William Cowper who observed that "[t]he learning, the good sense, the sound judgment, and the wit displayed in it fully justify not only my compliments, but all compliments . . ." (Doran 111). Doran notes that "the fashionable world flocked to [her] house in Hill Street" where she confessed to being "sick of Grecian elegance and symmetry" (7). Desirous of conforming to the fashion, she surrounded herself with Oriental artifacts then in vogue. Williams would have attended *bas-bleu* assemblies in 1781-3, by which time Montagu was in Portman Square.

These assemblies were described by Hannah More as "being composed of persons distinguished in general for their rank, talents, or respectable character . . . for the sole purpose of conversation, and were different from other parties, but that the company did not play cards" (204). According to Doran, More found these parties, "pleasant and instructive" finding there "learning without pedantry, good taste without affectation, and conversation without calumny, levity, or any censurable error" (213).

She also observed that people attending the larger gatherings also socialized in smaller groups that overlapped them. Williams probably appeared at such gatherings when they were less intimate, and at the overcrowded breakfasts (213). Commenting on one of Montagu's gatherings, Walpole noted that she "breakfasted seven hundred persons on opening her great room . . . with hangings of feathers" (*Letters* XV: 1).

References to Williams in the letters of Anna Seward and the diary of Fanny Burney place her within the circles of William Hayley, Charlotte Smith, Sarah Siddons, Hester Chapone, Benjamin Franklin, Joseph and Thomas Warton, Horace Walpole, George Romney, Pascal Paoli, Richard Kirwain, Joseph Johnson, Joseph Priestley, Robert Hoole, Samuel Johnson, and Horne Tooke, (Woodward 14-15)--probably in a manner noted by More with respect to the intertwining of circles. The extent of her interaction with these people is difficult to gauge, although, as noted, a number of inferences may be made from the letters of the time. Williams herself evidently hosted assemblies since William Hayley, writing in January 1783, indicated that parties and assemblies at the home of " the young muse," Williams herself, were numerous (16).

In 1783, Williams dedicated her second poem, *Ode on the Peace*--formed between England and the American colonies--to Elizabeth Montagu. In January of that year, she is described by Fanny Burney as being in a gathering which included Benjamin Franklin, but she identifies Williams as being so affected that Burney found it impossible to engage in a conversation with her (II: 301). It was a criticism together with those of her eccentricities in dress that was to be repeated by certain others, although there are several indications that many found her charming.

In one of at least four letters written by Anna Seward to Williams between 1789 and 1790, Seward congratulates her on her "last effusions that shone in the public eye, from an imagination, of which genius and beauty are the constant associates" (*Letters* III: 15). The editor indicates that this was a reference to the publication of Williams's only novel, *Julia*, which will be the focus, together with her early commentaries on France, of Chapter V.

Publications of 1782-1786

After the publication of her poem, *Peru*, in 1784, Williams spent time compiling an anthology that included the three successfully published since 1781 together with numerous others. Among the approximately 1570 subscribers to the two volumes of Williams's poetry in 1786 were those who could be depended on to subscribe to popular writers whose style was considered fashionable by the standards of the 1780s. They ranged through members of the royal household, assorted nobility, churchmen of various theological inclinations, professors of English and Scottish universities, writers, poets, painters, soldiers, and musicians. Among this group were several who were of significance in Williams's personal life in 1786 and beyond. Three intimates of Williams, her early mentor, Andrew Kippis and his wife, and her later partner, John Hurford Stone, then living in Hackney, appear in the list. Also present were her female associates, Elizabeth Montagu, Anna Seward, Sarah Siddons, Hannah More, and Sarah Bates. Included too was George Hardinge, Jnr. Elsewhere it was noted that "Two small volumes of *Poems* were published in 1786, under the patronage of a very numerous and respectable list of subscribers warmly promoted by Mr. Hardinge" (Woodward 82).

The responses to the requests for support prompted replies that indicate positive reactions to Williams from a wide range of eminent people. Not yet had she become the radical commentator vilified by Walpole and other supporters of the established political and social order. Beilby Porteus, bishop of Chester commented:

> Miss William's (sic) history is a very interesting one, and she is an Historian whose powers of description are worthy of the benevolent cause in which they are engaged. If my subscription was to bear any proportion to her merits and your eloquence, it would be a very large one . . . You will, I hope, accept the enclosed guinea as a small testimony of the high opinion I hold of Miss William's (sic) talents and virtues. (18)

Responding in similar fashion, Dr. North, bishop of Winchester, noted:

> Your good work recommends any object of relief to me, and your approbation bears ample testimony to the excellence both of the morals and writings of Miss Williams; but I am sorry you should have the trouble of writing in this instance, because Mrs. Bates hath already taken my name and guinea on Miss Williams' account. Had not this been the case, I should have begged for a place in your list. (18)

In the 1780s Williams was considered acceptable as a writer in the popular mode of Sensibility. When Williams dedicated her work to Queen Charlotte, thanking her for "her gracious protection," there was little evidence of the radical journalist, republican supporter, and civil libertarian that she was to become.

Conclusion

The themes of Williams's early politically and socially conscious publications and her emotionally evocative writing style indicate that she might have become more involved in publicizing radical views in England if her interest had not been captured by agitation for individual liberty and religious freedom in France. Williams's redirection of career was probably initiated sometime in 1786 when she and her sister made the acquaintance of a French tutor. The difficulties that he and his family experienced resulting from the curtailment of his civil liberties in France intrigued Williams sufficiently to cause her to leave England in 1790 to witness the changes brought in French legislation following the fall of the Bastille in 1789. Before her departure, her first and only novel *Julia* was published early in 1790[80], and provides a commentary on British social customs and morality. Among the poems that punctuated and annotated the prose was one in which she expressed her delight at the taking of the Bastille. It was the first published indication of her interest in French politics which later resulted in her returning only briefly to England in 1791, and then departing to reside in France for the rest of her life. Instead of poetic and prose fiction, Williams embarked on a career of radical political commentary.

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[80] Anna Seward comments in a letter to Hester Piozzi on April 9th 1790: "Though modern novels, are, in general, my aversion, yet I find many charms in Julia. Certainly Helen's style in prose bears no proportionate excellence to that of her charming poetry; and this work in barren of incident, her preface anticipating what little plot there is. But her characters are finely drawn" (*Letters* Vol. III 5).

CHAPTER V

Initiation into a "False Philosophy"

1790-1791

> Elegant in her style, classically correct and harmonious in her language, unaffected in her sentiments, and chastely true in the manners of her characters.[81]
>
> *European Magazine* June 1790: 435

> Miss Williams has been a successful candidate, both in verse and prose, for the public favour. On every occasion, this amiable letter writer warmly expresses her abhorrence of despotism, and nobly exults in the triumph of liberty over this horrible scourge of mankind.
>
> *London Monthly Review* 1790: 334

> Fortunately for this country, for the sex, and for posterity, such instances (as women like Helen Willams) have not been multiplied; the climate of Great Britain has not been congenial to their production; a few only of such individuals as a Macauley and a Wollstonecroft (sic) have attained a premature state, while those who have been cultivated until they reached maturity, have been, like the heroine of this sketch, transplanted to warmer regions, leaving the poisonous stings of their false philosophy to be corrected by the religious anodynes of a More, a Hamilton, and a West.[82]
>
> *The Ladies' Monthly Museum* January 1816: 1

Williams had been "transplanted to warmer regions" in the summer of 1790 when she began the first of eleven volumes of political commentary about the various stages of governmental changes experienced in France between 1789 and 1815. Her "false philosophy" included her belief in increased religious and political freedom which challenged the more conservative, traditionalist views reflected in writings of such women as Hannah More, and statesmen like Edmund Burke. Her departure for France, which followed the publication of *Julia*, was prompted by the hope of witnessing the effects of the French "experiment" that ended the despotic, feudal regime of Louis XVI in favor of entrenching civil libertarian laws similar to those advocated in Paine's *Rights of Man* in a new constitution. Despite the favorable reviews of her early commentaries by the *London Monthly Review*, comments aligning her with radical political agitators were more common. The *Gentleman's Magazine* of January, 1791 observed: "That an English lady should be fond of, or intoxicated with, liberty is no phenomenon in these times: or even that an English lady should be eager to parade the deception of the French Confederation. Such was Helen Maria Williams" [83](62). The "deception" implied agreement by the writer with Edmund Burke's dire predictions concerning the results of constitutional change and the advocacy of increased civil liberty in his 1790 *Reflections on the French Revolution* in response to the support for the movement by Williams's associates in Rational Dissent and other radicals.

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[81] Review of Williams's novel, *Julia*

[82] Criticism of Williams contained in an introductory biographical sketch to the January edition, with an admission at the end of the edition that the wrong engraving of her had been attached.

Williams's first volume of letters joined the discourse of men and some women favorable to legislative change by "a few only of such individuals" like Macaulay, and

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[83] A more positive reaction arose from Hester Piozzi: "Helena (sic) Williams is a courageous Damsel, and I will hope never be a distressed one in Consequence of that conduct, which if anything happens but good to her will be condemned as rashness" (Hester Piozzi to Penelope Sophia Weston, 18th August, 1791. (*Piozzi Letters* 361).

Wollstonecraft, who were opposed to the ultra-conservative rhetoric contained in Burke's *Reflections*. The period 1789 to 1791 proved to be one of transition for Williams's writing career and the following chapter examines the themes, style, and intent of *Julia*, her first two volumes of political commentary on France, and her *A Farewell to England* in 1791[84].

Interpretations of Williams's Themes and Style

A survey of perspectives on Williams and the themes and style of her discourse as expressed by her contemporaries reveal a range of opinions. Her early poetry, novel and early *Letters* were generally well received as apparent from such comments as those referred to in Chapter IV, and the epigraphs from the *London Review* cited in the introduction to this chapter. Also, a later comment from Hester Piozzi indicates the popularity of her first publications about France. Piozzi observed: "All the neighbourhood borrow Helen's last publication from me, so I scarce have read it" (*Intimate Letters*[85] 100).

Then, as now, there were a variety of opinions about her work and the perspectives they reflected. After surveying her writing during 1789 to 1791, I concluded that by transmitting opinions, which annotated her work in verse and prose, she conveyed views similar to those of associates in radical Rational Dissent who influenced her in the years prior to her publications. Although I recognize inclusion of her perception of ideal roles and characteristics for women in her novel and commentaries, I wish to stress the political motivation that was to remain a consistent feature throughout her writing beyond the 1790s. As a radical commentator in support of legislative reform in Europe, Williams's discourse served as a means of informally educating readers about principles that were basic to the beliefs of advocates of libertarian theory and practice such as those evident in *Cato's Letters*, Paine's *Rights*, Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, Price's *Observations*, and numerous other publications from the radical press. Other evidence that has caused me to focus on her political involvement is that indicating that she acted a "foreign correspondent" for the French reports appearing in the *New Annual Register* from 1791. The connection between Kippis and her writing continued almost to his death in 1795, as she makes evident in the poem eulogizing him in *Gentleman's Magazine* January, 1796. His importance to her as a mentor in her early youth and first publications has been cited earlier in this study using parts of the same poem, but his influence extended beyond those early years of publication. Williams makes obvious the fact that he edited and encouraged her political commentary, and sympathized with the opposition she faced in England and France. After his death, she regrets that:

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[84] Hester Piozzi informed Rev. L. Chappelow: "Do you know that one of our little darling W's deserts next Summer? She is going to reside in France for two or three years. I say She will come back a better Patriot than she goes away – a better or more amiable *Woman* can she not be" (Feb. 23:1791: *Letters* 348)

[85] In this letter of Nov. 4th 1793 to Pennington, Piozzi comments that the anticipated publisher of her recent book, Robinson, (Williams's publisher at this time) and she "are bargaining for it now, but they shall pay me a just price" (100)

> No more his letter'd aid, enlighten'd Sage!
> Shall mark the errors of my careless page;
> Shall hide from public view the faulty line,

And bid the merit he bestows be mine. (66)

Kippis founded the *Register*[86] and intended to provide information on history, politics, and literature of the year prior to its publication, which ran to an average of over 500 pages per issue. He continued to write the introductory article on the history of knowledge until 1794. "For some years (Williams) wrote the French Department in the *New Annual Register*, and that article like all her writings was distinguished by extraordinary eloquence" (from *Public Characters*. Qtd. By Woodward 141). Kippis's supportiveness during her later unpleasant experiences of anarchy in France is implied by her comment when a "weeping exile from my cherish'd home, /[87] His friendship o'er me spread the garden shield / Which his severest virtue but could wield" (66). Also that repelled "by him, relentless Slander found / Her darts bereft of half its pow'r to wound" (66).

Evidently Williams was engaged in more political reporting and commentary than that offered by her *Letters*, and Kippis was one of those who corresponded and empathized with the problems she experienced. Also relevant to establishing the connections Williams had with the publishing world in England at this time is the fact that the *New Annual Register* was published by G.G.J. and G Robinson, who also published several editions of her eight volumes of *Letters* about France. This would also seem to indicate that her epistolary style was a device used to appeal to women who might not read such a publication as the *Annual Register*, which probably had a considerable male clientele, since it provided extensive coverage of affairs in the British Parliament, and of the political news of countries such as America, Russia, and India. This further supports Mary Favret's contention about the letter-form's "potential for political agitation," and the agreement on this issue by Janet Todd and Antje Blank (*Desmond* 1997 xxiv).

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[86] Compiled in imitation of the Cambridge *Annual Register* founded in 1758 (Introduction to *New Annual Register* 1781).

[87] A reviewer adds the note to indicate Williams's exile in Switzerland during the Terror to explain the allusion in the poem to the "ignoble Tyrant of his country stood / And bath'd his scaffolds in the patriots' blood" (*Gentleman's Magazine* January 1796:66).

The *Register* prided itself on attempting to provide news, and reflections of political events collected by reliable correspondents and eyewitnesses who avoided "party" biases (1792: 3-4). This accords with Williams's belief that commentators like her were invaluable to historians. She could not bring herself to agree with those who thought that when reading history, the accounts of contemporaries should always be mistrusted. She questions: "*Quel guide meilleur l'historien peut-il prendre que l'impression de contemporains*?" [What better guide can a historian follow than the impressions of contemporaries?] (*Souvenirs* 103).

In Chapter IV, I suggested that opinions, expressed in prose or verse, and anecdotes punctuating her narratives of events serve as "annotations" (as suggested by McGann for her sonnets in her later translation of Bernadin de St. Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*). By using such a stylistic device, she drew her readers' attention to the main themes of her discourse. In the following chapters on her revolutionary perspectives, I provide evidence of the way in which such annotations serve to separate her style and intent from that of others who wrote memoirs or travelogues on revolutionary France. She herself was insistent that her readers should be aware that her writing was distinct from these (*Souvenirs* 4-5) because of her involvement with "all the principal actors" in the revolutionary drama (*Letters* 1796: 2), and her participation in a political career.

In *Revolutionary Feminism* (1992), Gary Kelly asserts that Williams "treats the Revolution in terms of acceptably feminine spheres of interest, especially 'sensibility' and the domestic affections, just as she had feminized such issues as slavery, imperial exploitation, and the American Revolution in the 1780s" (109). However, comments like the ones cited from *Ladies Monthly Museum*, and the *Gentleman's Magazine* in the introductory quotations to this chapter, suggest that by focusing on such themes as political liberty and freedom of religion, she also entered the ranks of male and female authors of radical commentary, and did not remain solely within the "acceptably feminine spheres of interest."

Williams details the roles of politically involved women like Marie-Jeanne Roland, Charlotte Corday, and several anonymous French women. However, she indicates that they were conscious of the freedom for which they were fighting as part of a broader issue, e.g., Roland's final letter with its references to the importance of the struggle for "Liberty"[88] (*Letters* I: 278-291). As Joan Wallach Scott notes, such feminists "mobilized to demand citizenship . . . [and] pointed to the political capacities of queens and of ordinary women such as Joan of Arc to legitimize their claims that they should not be denied political rights because of their sex" (*Feminism* 1996: 1-2). Among the majority in the society from which Williams emerged, political involvement by advocates for increased civil liberty was not generally acceptable--particularly not from women. However, in her first set of letters, Williams openly criticized English politicians who opposed the French "experiment," (*Letters* 1790: 135) and in 1791-1792 expressed her views on political reform, especially with regard to the evolution and anticipated progression in political reform.

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[88] "Enamoured of liberty, the value of which I learnt from reflection, I viewed the revolution with transport, persuaded that it was the epocha of the subversion of despotism, which I detest" (283).

Themes in *Julia* and *Letters from France*

The sensibility evident in Williams's poetry continued into her prose, and provides one of the themes on which I have focused in this study. The other theme which is entrenched in her radicalism in both sensibility and politics is that of civil liberty, her support of which is evident in her expressions of enthusiasm and rationalizing throughout volumes I and II of *Letters from France*. In this chapter I present evidence of these issues through the opinions which annotate her novel and commentaries. In *Julia* she provides a commentary on the development of passion which, when not tempered by reason, results in tragedy. Throughout the 1792 *Letters*, expressions of her beliefs punctuate a discourse in which she describes her visits to the National Assembly, the Louvre, the Palais Royale, the Bastille, the Tuilleries, Versailles, La Maison de Ville, the cathedral, commercial centers of Rouen, and her visit to Madame de Sillery/Brulart. These annotations provide a representation of her attitude towards politics, religion, and participation in the Revolution by people of all ranks, and of both sexes.

Regarding civil liberty, a review, published in the same issue of *The London Review* as that on Williams's *Julia* in June 1790, calls attention to the "entertainment" of the "justest sentiments of Civil Liberty" by a "Layman." He asserts that in pleading the cause of religious freedom relative to Dissenters, there "are no greater admirers of the Constitution, as established in King, Lords, and Commons, than Protestant Dissenters. At the same time they contend, on behalf of themselves and posterity, that there are certain defensible rights and essential privileges reserved to the members of a free State at large as their undoubted birthright and unalienable property" (439).

In the second volume of *Letters*, Williams exposes her belief in aspects of British liberal heritage, from the time of Locke and Sidney, but her comments on the Revolution express the hope that France might follow the type of constitution similar to that in Britain.

As noted in Chapter IV, Williams's thoughts about civil liberty were grounded in Dissent. Like her associates, she acknowledged the progress made by British legislation beyond the feudal state of France, and, like them, she was to support progress in political and religious reform. She evidently anticipated further change in England, hoping that her native country might make political progress "with no other arms than reason" (*Letters* 1791: 116). An observation in the *New Annual Register* of 1792 reflects the beliefs she implies in her *Letters* and suggests that: "no grounds for comparison exist[ed]" (v) between the situation in Britain and France; consequently there was no necessity for a revolution in England. (Williams often displayed a pride and support for the British constitution in a manner indicated in the Introduction to the 1792 *Register*: "The monarchy, the hierarchy, the aristocracy, of France were all totally different from ours, indeed formed upon opposite principles.") However, the reform-minded editor of the *Register* observed: "We would not be understood to insinuate that our present constitution is perfect; but the vices of our government are entirely different from the vices of the old government of France, and must be reformed in a different manner"(vi).

Julia as a Reconfiguration of Heloise

One year after the success of her anti-slavery poem in 1788, Williams published her only novel, *Julia*. In April 1789, Anna Seward thanked her for copies of the novel commenting that "the characters are drawn with great spirit and truth" (Seward *Letters* III: 16). *The London Monthly Review* noted that the novel "not only possesses no pernicious tendency, but conveys a very useful moral . . . a simple, instructive and affecting story" (1790 II: 334).

Throughout a narrative detailing male-female relationships in the eighteenth century, Williams adds her opinions about the "fatal effects which may arise from the unrestrained indulgence of the passions of love, even in virtuous minds when misdirected in its object" (*London Review* 1790: 435). She also expresses her sentiments on the characteristics of men and women that she perceives most appropriate in an "enlightened society."

Williams's stated intent in writing *Julia* was to:

> trace the dangers arising from uncontroulled (sic) indulgence in strong affections; not in the guilty excesses of passion in a corrupted mind - but, when disapproved by reason, and uncircumscribed by providence, they involve even the virtuous in calamity. (Preface)

To attain this, Williams draws her readers into the experiences of her heroine, Julia, who discovers she is loved by her cousin's fiancé. Unlike Julie in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise*, she does not become involved in an affair. She does not beg her lover, Frederick, to break his commitment, and he remains determined to honor his promise to Julia's cousin. However, unable to bear the loss of Julia, he eventually dies of grief. Refusing several marriage proposals, Julia continues to live with her father and the household is enlarged by Mr. F___ who, loving Julia, prefers to live celibate with her rather than enter an "insincere" marital state. She remains single, spending her time in "good works," and attending to her deceased lover's child by her cousin. A subplot involving the brother of Mr. F___ and his relationship with an American woman, Sophie, during the American War of Independence, allows Williams to extend the fatal problem experienced by Julia's lover in the main plot to women. Sophie dies of grief when Mr. F___'s brother dies. By allowing the reader a glimpse of the effects of war on families, Williams also draws attention to another issue that concerned her and which had been a focus of her earlier anti-war poetry,[89] the devastating effects of war on the domestic sphere.

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[89] *Edwin and Eltruda*, "The American Tale" and *Peru*.

By punctuating her narrative with "annotations" through the medium of poetry in addition to her use of them in prose, Williams used the same technique she was to use later in her translation of St. Pierre's novel (1793). By so doing she provided further indications of her precepts. The poems appear as an expression of Julia's sentiments. In "Ode to Poetry," she acknowledges that poetry always expressed her happiest moments. She asks "when did my fancy ever frame / A dream of joy by thee unblest" (16). In contrast to the "idle crowd" with "their trifling comment, pert reply, / Who talk too much, yet talk in vain," poetry is "all the wealth of mind . . . the unborrowed gems of thought . . . from heaven" (76). Demonstrating her belief in the manifestation of sensibility, the influence of Shakespeare, Milton, Homer, "the master of Otaheite," and Ossian provide her with "the joy of tears." While Thomson's attention to Nature transports her from London's smoke (21), Pope's dispels winter's dreariness. She also alludes to wandering with Gray "the mournful bard" without naming him. By the joys of poetry her life is blessed and her "fond soul" is appreciative since one of the most precious properties of poetry is its ability to distract the mind from care and misfortune to "scenes bright with sunshine" (14).[90] These were not merely words for her poem, since when she was later imprisoned in Paris she noted that a particular tapestry of a country scene could diminish her sadness. It would seem that Williams entered into what William Walker notes as a "central enterprise of Wordsworth and Coleridge," that of putting together the 'subject' and 'object' that the intellectualism of Locke and the Enlightenment had "put asunder" (1994: 6). By this intent, they were able to "revivify a dead nature, restore its concreteness, significance, and human values, and re-domiciliate man in a world which had become alien to him."[91]

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[90] Her reflections on poetry are reminiscent of the observation she had made about its importance in her letter to Burns in 1787 referred to in Chapter IV of this study.

With regard to sensibility and sentiment, Williams's belief that only certain people were endowed with a sensibility that affected their ethical and moral conduct becomes clear as she describes her characters. Julia's "sensibility is quick," she is liberally endowed with understanding and virtue; and "her disposition is affectionate, with an uncommon degree of elegance and refinement" (*Julia* I 3). Her manners were modest, and she speaks simply "from the impulse of her heart with amiable candor and frankness." In appearance she has an "expression of intelligence and sensibility" (7). In contrast, her cousin Charlotte possessing a lesser degree of "taste, sensibility, and beauty" is vain. She felt that sentiment (not mentioned in connection with Julia) is "amiable" (29), but confines it to descriptions of contrived moods of melancholy, "pensiveness," and "affected sighs." Possessed of "sentimental perverseness," while fond of sunshine, she "feigned gloom." At the theater Charlotte only affected sensibility, causing her to weep in the wrong places! Williams is equally scathing about the character of Charles Seymour, Frederick's brother who had married for money indicating that he was "not a dupe of sensibility." He danced only with the wealthy, favoring Charlotte and neglecting Julia, who found him rude and boorish with a manner that made conversation with him like "traveling over sands" (51). His mother is dealt a no more attractive character since she "valued superior abilities only when they were united with fortune," and "saw no beauty in intellect- unless it had the lustre of wealth"(42). She places the same qualities within Charles Seymour noting that such traits had "blunted his sensibility" (53).

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[91] Qtd. by Walker from M.H.Abrams "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," from *Sensibility to Romanticism* (546).

However, for the fond but disappointed lover of Julia who refuses to renege on a commitment to marry Charlotte after realizing he loves Julia, Williams reserves similar qualities as those she assigned to Julia. Frederick Seymour, unlike his brother, Charles, disclaimed duplicity and, like Julia, had an expression of intelligence and sensibility, an elevated understanding, nobler ambitions and candor. In the drawing of such characters, Williams indicates her belief that gender does not determine "nobler" character traits. To further reinforce this genderless ascription, she determines Frederick's fate to die for love of Julia, a fate the reader would have previously found more traditionally believable of women than men.

In her concluding remarks to the novel, Williams returns the reader to thoughts of her intent. In her preface she had warned against indulgence in passion uncontrolled by reason. To reinforce her prime intent she points out that if passion is allowed "to acquire ascendancy over reason, we shall in vain attempt to control its power" (238), and that Julia "insofar as she had indulged any sensibility to Seymour's attachment was proportionately wretched" (239). As a further reminder to women, she emphasizes the fact that "women have greater reason to fortify their hearts . . . since they cannot turn to business, or dissipate themselves in pleasure and riot as men too often do when under pressure from misfortunes" (240). In a sentimental, idealistic vein common to such moralistic novels, Williams concludes that if "not for that one unconquered weakness, [Julia] could have been above the common lot, fortunate and happy" (245).

Julia as a Revelation of Williams

Julia provides an insight into Williams's views about the insincerity and snobbery existing in eighteenth century society, particularly with reference to marriage contracts. She infers adverse criticism of male-female associations that were governed by certain norms in fashionable society. Her adherence to the elevating essence of sensibility, which permeated her earlier published poetry, is evident throughout her prose. Her heroine, and the man who loves Julia, both possess expressions of "intelligence and sensibility" (7). At variance were the male and female characters representing those whom Williams least liked in society--those who lacked sensibility leaving them selfish, and vain, concerned only with what might bring them greater financial security from marriage settlements, or further their aspirations for increased prestige (37). She sarcastically observes that such characters are unable to appreciate intellect unless it is accompanied by wealth. Their female counterparts possess an affected sentimentality, which Williams contrasts to the more authentic expression of higher moral sentiment associated with her perception of sensibility. The presence or absence of sensibility in a character is used to focus the readers' attention on the type of people capable of more virtuous interaction beneficial to civil society, a common feature of novels of the period.

Intending to indicate the "superior style and sentiments" of Williams, *The London Review*'s assessment of *Julia* (June 1790: 433-39) includes thirty-three paragraphs selected from various places in the text of her novel. They provide examples of opinions, and judgements that intersperse the narrative in the form earlier alluded to as annotations. Through these Williams conveys positive and negative impressions of "the burdening of society with forms of ancient ceremony." She is critical of insincerity, and self-interest shown by some espousing benevolence (53), the "despicable nature of avarice" (150), and the triviality and repetitive nature of fashionable conversation (38-9). Conversely, she lauds the positive aspects of "of kindness that flows through the heart like a clear stream," and the sensitivity of some individuals to the "sacred presence" in the contemplation of Nature (231). With reference to Williams's spirituality, which was always a factor in her ability to sustain the disillusionment, and trauma she evidently experienced in the course of her physically and intellectually active life, several inferences are detectable in *Julia*.

As noted in the previous chapter the "creed" of sensibility caused writers to attempt to reform attitudes of morality and manners. As her career advanced, this becomes increasingly obvious in Williams's writing. Like the later Romantic writers, she seeks to combine the Lockean rationality, as witnessed in the preface of Julia, with emotion and place into this the spiritual dimension of her intellect. Julia, whom one comes increasingly to suspect is Williams's alter ego, together with being to some degree a reflector of her social experiences, delighted in such moments when the soul seemed conscious of her "native dignity" that brought the bearer "nearer the Deity," in moments when the soul senses "his sacred presence," and the "low-minded cares of earth vanish" (216).

When Williams ascribes such moments to experiences of Nature, she expresses the transcendental also evident in Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Humboldt. She seems to have embraced a form of Deism that allowed her a paradenominational view, allowing her to participate in the services of a variety of churches. This would be in accord with her belief and that of her dissenting friends, in toleration and the right to an individual religious conscience. She also noted that the channel to higher reason and moral direction was afforded through poetry, Nature,[92] and moments when she felt the "sublime." As earlier observed, she continued in the language of sensibility, and assigned a sacred nature to the ability to feel compassion and to interactions which seemed just and beneficial to all levels of humanity.

Of sensibility Williams observes that in "a mind where principles of religion and integrity are firmly established sensibility is not merely the ally of weakness, or the slave of guilt, but serves to give a stronger impulse to virtue"(*Julia*, Preface). She contends that the latter quality is the "only true support of pleasure, which when disjoined from it . . . decays and perishes" (Preface), as she is to demonstrate in the tragic love interest of her main character.

Throughout the two volumes of *Julia*, and in a style similar to that in her early poems and later political commentary, Williams presents characteristics of sensibility, empathy, unselfishness, and tenderness in those whom she considers most honorable. Also she implies the need to temper emotion with reason to support her introductory premise. Her feminine perspective includes an identification with men who show the refinement of taste and morals, which affects their attitudes in both peace and war. She does not confine her adherence to the effects of a cultivated sensibility to females, but invests certain males with similar traits placing them in a mode divinely intended, whom only others of their type may recognize and appreciate. In relation to the belief that "true" sensibility is ungendered, Williams invests both sexes with tears, a possible indication of their place in the "special population who love and move and have their being by affect, through sympathy . . . " (McGann 7).

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[92] Humboldt also made a connection between Nature, the sublime and the "moral condition": "Everywhere the reader's attention is directed to the perpetual influence which physical nature exercises on the moral condition and on the destiny of man" (*Views of Nature*, 1817 Preface).

In the following year, Williams produced stylistically and thematically different discourse in the first volume of her eight *Letters from France*. While *Julia* projected certain ideals for social relations, her letters reflected the political idealism of certain radical intellectuals in Britain and France. Both demonstrate the humanitarianism advocated by the culture of sensibility. Her transition to political commentary is indicative of the fact that she went beyond the sentimental fiction of writers like Inchbald and Radcliffe whose "teaching" was intent on "persuading men to treat women with greater humanity" (Barker-Benfield 227).

The inclusion of "The Bastille, A Vision," towards the end of the second volume of *Julia* betrays the fact that Williams was already sympathetic to the French Revolution. In a vision of freedom from the Bastille, the prisoner praises the "philosophy," (later to be termed by her detractors a "false philosophy" as indicated in the comments cited in the introduction to this chapter) which caused the prison's destruction. She terms it "Freedom's noblest deed" (222). Freedom is personified as the "Guardian of bliss, and friend of man! / . . . to give each generous purpose birth, / And renovate the gladden'd earth" (223). The fact that the poem is supposedly the vision of a prisoner in the Bastille is no doubt a reflection of her awareness of the use of *lettre de cachet*, and other types of legal restraint practiced in France, acquired through her friendship with the du Fossé family. It was this friendship and her interest in witnessing the results of the 1789 uprising that drew her to France later in the summer of 1790, three months after the publication of *Julia*. In later years, she was to reflect that the true reason for her departure for France in 1790 "*était l'espoir d'assister de près aux victoires de la liberté; cette attente faisait battre mon coeur*" [was the hope of assisting in the victories of liberty; this hope beat in my heart] (*Souvenirs* 11).

Themes and Perspectives in *Letters from France* 1790 to 1792

The character of Julia probably reflects Williams's adult life experiences in London: her writings from France after 1790 demonstrate her abandonment of English literary circles, and any possible career as a novelist. By the late summer of 1790, she had entered a period of involvement in discussion and reflection on the problems of political injustice with those reformers, primarily among the Brissotin/Girondin faction, who were theorizing on, and participating in active attempts at political reform in France.

When Williams began to change the focus of her writing to attempts to revolutionize French politics, she also changed her style. She began to use the epistolary style of others involved in political agitation, but continued her stylistic device of annotation. She was to continue to annotate her discourse with her opinions on reactions to government policies and their effects, and maintained her concern about civil rights which was a prime focus of her Rational Dissenting associations throughout her youth in Britain.

It was sometime after 1786 that Williams decided to experience life in France motivated by the tales she heard when she and her sister, Cecilia, became acquainted with French tutors, Augustin Thomas du Fossé, a French aristocrat, and his wife, Monique (née Coquerel[93]) both refugees. When an opportunity presented itself for her to stay with the du Fossé family at their chateau in Rouen in the summer of 1790, Williams chose it as the place to reflect on the joy she experienced in the first year of the French "experiment" in legislative change. The set of letters she produced detailed her experiences and reflections on the day of Federation, July 14th 1790, and the mood of the French people as she toured Paris and Rouen. She includes her introduction to Stephanie de Genlis, mistress of the pro-revolutionary Duc d'Orleans[94], governess to his children (the eldest of whom became the "citizen king" of France from 1830 to 1848), and author of numerous education texts that were popular in England.

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[93] Cecilia married Athanase Coquerel, the nephew of Monique Coquerel in 1794. (*Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals 1770-1830*. J.Bayle and J.Gossman. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979: 541)

[94] Williams acknowledged in a letter to Hester Piozzi (October 12th 1790) that the Duc d'Orleans provided her and her sister with introductions to the prominent families of Orleans, but they found the city "intellectually and politically" narrow and moved to Paris (*Piozzi Letters* 374)

Since Orleans was elected the first president[95] of the new National Assembly in 1789, Williams would have had introductions to government circles from the beginning of her residence in France. In *A View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland and Germany* (1779), Dr. John Moore[96] observed that he was accepted into homes, even by the first nobility, on the most "liberal footing" (27) because he was an educated man. Making a similar observation six years later, John Andrews commented that among "the French more than perhaps any other nation an equality in point of education, secures reciprocation of good manners between persons of very different degrees" (*A Comparative View* 45). During Williams's first visit to France, it is apparent that she found acceptance among pro-revolutionary sympathizers in the Orleans' aristocratic circles, and among those who were members of the National Assembly. Familiar with the salons of literary intellectuals in England, she does not seem to have displayed any lack of confidence, or lack of contacts, even in the early days of her French experience. Her educated writings in support of the revolution were to further attach her to Girondins such as Marie-Jeanne Roland and Jacques-Pierre Brissot, and broaden her circle of salon associations. Several British visitors including Wordsworth and Charles Lamb, who wished to find out for themselves the truth of the effects of the political change in France, were directed to Williams with letters of introduction from people like Hester Piozzi.

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[95] Although he declined the position.

[96] A frequent contributor to the *New Annual Register* in the 1780s, and friend of Williams from early in this decade.

The letters about her initial experiences in France were published late in 1790.[97] This was at the time of the beginning of the lengthy critical responses by James Mackintosh, Joseph Priestley, Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Paine, and the shorter responses of other liberal dissenters like Anna Laetitia Barbauld, William Blake, Charlotte Smith and Thomas Christie to Edmund Burke's anti-liberal defense of the status quo. His *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was written in response to his fear of the growing encouragement by Rational Dissenters and other supporters of the American constitution for the French "experiment." The immediate motivation for Burke's lengthy invective against the French appears to have been Dr. Richard Price's sermon to a meeting of the London Revolutionary Society on November 4th, 1789. Burke was annoyed when Price[98] proceeded "dogmatically to assert" that English liberty dated from the English Revolution of 1688. He denied that three fundamental rights: "to choose our own governors; to cashier them for misconduct"; and "to frame a government for themselves," were anything but an "unheard-of bill of rights" that belonged to "those gentlemen (supporting Price) and their faction only" (*Reflections*

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[97] Williams was back in England and visited Hester Piozzi at Streatham Park on 8th December, 1790. (*Piozzi Letters* 342)

[98] Burke characterizes Price as "a man much connected with literary caballers, and intriguing philosophers; with political theologians, and theological politicians both at home and abroad" (22).

27). However, a letter prior to this from his former friend Thomas Paine[99] was also part of the writings that were surfacing, and which obviously caused Burke to fear that the Revolution might cross the channel.

Apart from his concern about "literary caballers and intriguing philosophers" alluded to in his *Reflections*, another of the forces which Burke and other traditionalists feared was the influence of women in politics. Williams mentions the participation of women in the revolution, and in the first volume of the *Letters* she makes a comment which clearly indicates her perspective on the importance of the roles of women when she asserts:

> The women have certainly had a considerable share in the French Revolution; for whatever the imperious lords of creation may fancy the most important events which take place in the world depend a little on our influence, and we often act in human affairs like the secret springs of mechanisms, by which, though invisible great movements are regulated. (*Letters* 1790: 38)

During her enthusiasm for the changes she observed following the hopes that the initial stages of revolution generated, Williams also makes clear her own annoyance at the attitude of British critics of the Revolution. Her experience of the Girondins and other social contacts among those exhibiting "elegant graces of the most polished manners, all the amiable urbanity of liberal and cultivated minds" (219), blinded her to the problems that Burke had so clearly anticipated in *Reflections*. He maintained that

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[99] "Little did Paine know that his firsthand account of events in the streets of Paris was destined to fuel one of the bitterest political controversies in British politics." A comment by John Keane on the effect of Paine's friendly letter to Burke in January 1790 (1995: 286-7).

"they who make everything new have a chance that they may establish something beneficial," and that to "give them credit for what they have done in virtue of the authority they have usurped, or which can excuse them . . . the same things could not have been accomplished without a revolution" (*Reflections* 264). However, he cautioned:

> If any of [the French leaders] happen to propose a scheme of liberty, soberly limited, and defined with proper qualifications, he will be immediately outbid by his competitors, who will produce something more splendidly popular. (264)

Following her association with those whose legislative projections were "splendidly popular" in 1790, Williams asks:

> Must I be told that my mind is perverted, that I am become dead to all sensations of sympathy, because I do not weep for those who have lost their superfluitie, rather than rejoice that the oppressed are protected, that the wronged are redressed, that the captive is set at liberty, and the poor have bread? (*Letters* 1790: 218)

Following Williams's return, Anna Seward, writing to her on December 12, thanks her for "a charming pamphlet, that shows the sunny side of the French Revolution" (III: 44). Confessing that she has not read Burke's "celebrated pamphlet" which had deepened the "darkness, clouds and shadows" of "national envy" of the apparent French success into "chaotic night" (44), Seward expresses the hope that France will avoid the evils of anarchy which Burke's "ill-omened eloquence would persuade . . . are inevitable" (45). She criticizes Burke suggesting that his "boasted code of pure morality will never, by all the good it has done, or may yet produce, balance to his country the evils to which he was accessary (sic), by vindicating the absurd and ruinous attempt to conquer America" (45). She sympathizes with the du Fossés' sufferings detailed by Williams in her first volume.

From comments that intersperse and annotate her narrative from her descriptions of events at the Federation, the reactions of people of all ranks, and her visits to various "tourist" locations, I concluded that one of the themes in the first volume concerns the concept of "Liberty" from more feudal systems. Although she is supportive of the British constitutional system and assumes at this stage that French reform will copy Britain's, she implies that England has not moved far enough in legislative reform. She hopes that a time will come when "England will submit to be taught by another nation the lesson of humility," and that its House of Commons "will never persist in thinking that what is morally wrong can be politically right" (48-9). Whether the new French system proves "more or less perfect" than the English one, she wishes that England's "political critics would speak with less contempt, than they are apt to do of the new constitution in France." Also that they would "no longer repeat after one another the trite remarks, that the French have gone too far, because they have gone further than ourselves" (II: 68). Noting that the "temple of Freedom being erected, even if imperfect in some of its proportions," is superior to the "old Gothic fabric which they have laid in ruins" (II: 67), she suggests that the English should not criticize France for "learning the noble lesson of liberty which England taught" (68). At this stage she assumes the English criticism is an indication of "mean jealousy." She does not suspect the difficulty involved in replacing an authoritarian system with greatly increased civil liberty in a country where the majority was used to being obedient to the hierarchical system and who were for the most part illiterate.[100] From 1791, there appeared lengthy article in the *New Annual Register* professing to provide fairer assessments of the events during the Revolution. Since this periodical was founded by Andrew Kippis in 1781, and since Williams wrote for it, it may be deduced that the sentiments expressed in it are similar to those she held. Indeed, the Prefaces and several of the articles in 1791 and 1792, do reflect some of the views expressed by Williams, at first supportive and then critical of the inability of the new government to produce stability in the implementation of its early ideals, and the devolution into violence, terror and a new form of despotism. In 1791, the Preface contains the promise to be "not sparing of our strictures on the conduct of the parties; whenever the principles of justice are outraged; and whenever the cause of liberty is disgraced, as in too many instances it was by the populace of France and their demagogues." However, there is a reminder to readers that, despite the fact that the

> conduct of actors in this great event was not always immaculate, . . . those who are, in general, hostile to it, may perhaps be induced to allow that such an amazing change in a despotic government, the abuses of which so many were interested in preserving, could not be conducted without some acts of violence and outrage-Where the people are to do everything, they will do some things wrong. (Preface 1791:4)

Initially, Williams's experience of, and the emotional impact on her of the anniversary celebrations in the Champs de Mars in August 1790, where approximately 500,000 people assembled after those of all ranks helped to prepare for the spectacular events, left her feeling for years afterwards that it was "a triumph of humankind" since it was "man asserting the noblest privileges of his nature" (I: 13). Rhapsodizing about the event she observed that it "required but the common feelings of humanity to become in that moment a citizen of the world"[101] (14). Apart from being affected by the lavish, dignified, and emotional ceremony, she was impressed by the old men kneeling in the streets in grateful acknowledgement of the change, and women vowing to raise their children to have "an inviolable attachment to the new constitution"(10). Her sensibility is evident in her reaction to the "sublimity" of the spectacle as elevating to the mind, "commanding the enthusiasm of moral sentiment, the imagination and the understanding" (6).

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[100] After complaining about the "incorrect and inaccurate conjectures" in England about the Revolution, the author of the Preface to the *New Annual Register* expresses the hope of providing fairer assessment. Admitting that the publication professes "to be friends of freedom in general," he promises that accounts will prove "not sparing of our strictures on the conduct of the parties; whenever the principles of justice are outraged; and whenever the cause of liberty is disgraced, as in too many instance it was, by the populace of France and their demagogues." (1791:4)

In her visit to the former area of the Bastille, she expresses surprise that a nation as "enlightened as the French submitted so long to the oppressions of their government" (II: 24), and naively hopes that "the baleful lustre" of despotism might have been extinguished forever (25). She felt from her observations that the "love of liberty [had] pervaded all ranks," (70) and falls into a reverie about it, reminiscent in intensity of feeling evident in her poem on the Bastille in *Julia*, hoping that:

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[101] A reviewer of a three volume presentation of different views on the Revolution in the *Critical Review* (June, 1812) acknowledging the reactions of those who "rejoiced to contemplate the extension of civil liberty in France," observed there had been a feeling that "the French nation seemed to rise up as one man to reclaim their rights and to assert a place of pre-eminence amongst the few free nations of the globe" (365).

> no such strong contrast of light and dark again exist in the political system of France! but may the beams of liberty . . . shed their benign influence on the cottage of the peasant as well as the palace of the monarch! May liberty . . . diffuse her blessings . . . on the genial land of France and bid the husbandman rejoice under the shade of the olive and vine! (26)

A visit to the National Assembly convinced her that several of the leaders she then observed, and with whom she would become more personally acquainted, were men whose magnanimity had "invested them with the power to destroy the old constitution. It appeared at the time that their "wisdom [was] erecting the new on the principle of perfection which was hitherto thought chimerical, and [had] only served to adorn the page of philosophy, but which they [believed] may be reduced to practice, and therefore [had] the courage to attempt it" (45-6). Later she was to recognize their naiveté and her own, and the dissonance between the philosophy of the salon, and that understood by the majority of the citizens. However, at this point in her experience of the Revolution, Williams saw the joy of the people suddenly freed from old terrors and restrictions, and thought this would make them protective of the new order. Later they proved, because of the lack of civic and other education, to be more comfortable with some form of autocratic rule and other versions of despotism.

The joy she felt as she watched people initially behaving in a more democratic manner was identified in her mind with the happiness of her friends, the du Fossés, restored to their chateau after several years of suffering through the laws of the old régime. She acknowledged that at this stage her "political career [was] entirely an affair of the heart" since she was not so "absurd as to consult her head about matters of which it is incapable of judging" (66). Her ascription to a Humean[102] moral sense and the importance of feelings is evident in such comments.

Rationalizing the violence that had accompanied the beginning of the Revolution, Williams questioned: "Where do the records of history point out a revolution unstained by some actions of barbarity? When do the passions of human nature rise to that pitch which produces great events without some irregularities?" (80). Also she observes that the liberty of twenty four million people seemed thus far to have been purchased cheaply (81). She naively felt sure that the people would not wish to change the "new courts of judicature ... for the caprice of power" (105).

Following her description of events, places, and the reactions she witnessed, she provided her reader with the story of the miseries experienced by the du Fossés to attest to the change of fortune and happiness in a family she viewed with admiration and affection, and who had caused her initial visit to France. The story, like her opinions and reveries, which annotate the descriptions of her first observations of Revolutionary France, are an attempt to persuade the reader to consider the justification for the French experiment despite the criticisms of English politicians and the stories of the bitter, refugee aristocrats. Her final comments on her first visit were to request support and a patient attitude towards the French attempt to reform the former feudal system which Britain had been the first to reconstitute (I: 134-5).

By the Spring of 1791, Williams had produced another volume of letters detailing further visits to Rouen, Orleans, and Paris together with another non-fictional narrative about the problems of a couple of differing social status in pre-revolutionary France paralleling that of the du Fossé family. On her return to Paris from Normandy, she again observed the National Assembly and, as indicated in Chapter IV, expressed her support for the new legislation which projected the development of a national system of education proposed by Mirabeau and Condorcet. In travels to Orleans, she annotates her observations of places and people with comments like "we see the blessings of enlightened freedom" (118). Confidently she tells her readers:"You will be disposed to believe . . . that in France, talents and patriotism are, as I have often told you, in strict alliance" (128). She was experiencing the halcyon days following the optimistic initiation of the new system, and her writings are full of positive observations and projections.[103]

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[102] Evidence of her knowledge of his work is her allusion to him in the second volume of the *Letters* (43).

Williams continued an interest in her own education beyond that gained from her personal experiences of events of the revolution evidenced by her attendance of lectures at the Lycée. Impressed by the patriotism of supporters of the new regime, she watched soldiers depart to defend France against the threatened attacks from Austria and Germany. In an aside she warns her reader that refugee aristocrats in England were misleading them by saying that the cause of freedom "was merely a fashion which would not long be *l'ordre du jour*" (150). She expressed the hope that the systems of National education proposed by Mirabeau and Condorcet (117) would make the rising generation "worthy of their destiny in a more liberal society."

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[103] The reviewer noted on page 144 of this chapter from the *Critical Review* of June, 1812 also noted of the feelings of some in 1790: "We were then young . . . We thought that we might safely augur the coming of Halcyon days; and that justice and truth, which had long experienced the neglect of ministers and kings, were about to take their station in the councils of princes . . . We are not ashamed to confess, that we were not exempted from the delusion of hope and the anticipation of bliss which were generally excited by the rise of political liberty in France" (365)

In an attempt to stress the problems arising in the pre-revolutionary domestic sphere, Williams recounts the story of the bourgeois Madeleine and her lover, the aristocratic, Auguste. It parallels her tale of the du Fossés in her first volume of letters. Not accepted as a daughter-in-law by Auguste's father, Madeleine attempts to enter a convent, but before she can, the National Assembly forbade "nuns to be professed" (180), and after the change of laws, Auguste returns to marry her.

Residing for a while in Paris, Williams delighted in the religious freedom so important to Dissenters, brought by the Revolution and attended a French Protestant church. As she was about to leave for England, war began against Germany whom she classes with the other despotic powers of Europe.

During her travels and reflections in 1791, Williams's "annotations" include a variety of observations which prove her continued use of the stylistic mode of writers of sensibility. Supportive of the revival in commerce caused by the legislative changes, she pauses to reflect on some of its negative impact on others. Noting that the main article of commerce in Orleans was the refining of sugar, she reminds her reader of the horrors occurring elsewhere in its production. Watching the process by which the sugar is clarified by the blood of oxen, so that the resulting liquid looks deep red, she recalls the slave trade and the "frightful reservoirs struck [her] imagination as if stained with the blood of Africans" (32). Revisiting her enthusiasm for the first National Assembly, she laments that the second one did not "display the same blaze of talents which astonished and dazzled the former" (II: 102). However, in a "flight of rhetoric," she places the events there in the greater stage of Europe, and asserts that a member of the National Assembly knows "that he is pleading not merely the cause of the people of France. He is speaking at the tribune of Europe, and he is pleading the cause of all the people of the earth" (103). Displaying an intensity of feeling, she informs her reader that:

> If you had an opportunity of knowing as well as I do, the generous, the sublime sacrifices which are made by individuals in the common cause – if you knew the energy of the public spirit, the force of the public virtue which the events of this great revolution are calculated not merely to display, but to create, and call forth – if you knew the inflexible purpose of the patriots of France . . . you would, I believe, be as convinced, as I am, that they can never be subdued; and that, in defiance of the house of Austria, and all the other despotic houses of Europe, "*ça ira*"[104] (202-3)

Reflecting on the lives of nuns in the Hotel Dieu, Williams turns her readers' focus to the contrast between their compassionate attitude and indifference of which she was always critical. Leaving the atmosphere of charity in the convent, she muses:

> When we turn our thoughts from such a scene as this, to the unfeeling indifference which prevails in the world – its selfish pursuit of its own interest – its eager search for its own gratifications – its vanities – its littleness – its luxuries – we find it at a distance so remote from such virtue. (194)

Of the people generally, she observes that their sentiments are "elevated far above the common pitch of life"(7), and are so pronounced that living in France at that time appeared to her "like living in a region of romance" (6). However, she also begged the readers to be aware that they "are not reading a tale of fiction" when adding the story of Madeleine. However, they should remember that the setting was not in the "cold philosophic climate of England, but in the warm regions of the south of France, where the imagination is elevated, where the passions acquire extraordinary energy, and where the fire of poetry flashed from harps . . . amidst the gloom of Gothic ages" (156).

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[104] "It will proceed" was a favorite saying in revolutionary France--and of Benjamin Franklin.

By July 1791 Seward was predicting that if "Helen Williams goes again to France, and for a long a time, it is probable she will be lost to her native country" since her "graces will find some patriot heart, with whom she will, in turn, be charmed" (44). After a brief stay in England Williams returned to France in 1791. Before doing so she produced *A Farewell for Two Years to England*. She was not to return. A review and publication of the poem in *The London Review* of August 1791 acknowledges her praise for the Revolution in France where "new born Freedom treads the banks of Seine, / Hope in her eye and Virtue in her train"(114-115). In the first fifty-two lines Williams calls to mind the seasons, scenery, and friends she will miss, and writes of the happiness of life in England. The reviewer is skeptical about her comments on the situation in France. He asserts that the expectations she has "are not built on sound foundations" (114) when she believed "all the dangers and difficulties at an end" in France (114), and he suggests that the fulfillment of her hopes will be more distant than she supposes (115).

In a letter to Mrs. Knowles (May 19, 1791), Seward indicates agreement with

Williams in her admiration for the French attempts and despite the dangers of that moment, hopes that they might "prove a pattern, hereafter, of public virtue and public happiness to the whole world" (III: 78). Later she was to criticize the French "experiment" like others who had been initially optimistic about the outcome of the legislative changes. In January 1793 she writes to Williams lamenting that she had left their "happy country for the regions of anarchy and murder" (202). Reminiscent of Burke's view, she admonishes:

> See what it is to destroy the chain of subordination, which binds the various orders of national society in one common form of polity . . . it lays those necessary restraints upon the headstrong and undiscerning passions of the vulgar, which form their best and truest liberty; and without which, as the rash experiment in France evinces, all is ferocious contest, that appals the spirit. (202)

However, despite the views of many like Seward, (who turned away in horror from the anarchy that followed the days that Williams recalled in "regions of romance," in her writing about the French attempt to reform its legislation), Williams was to remain hopeful--while expressing her dismay at events--even after the anarchy of the Reign of Terror, blaming such setbacks on ambitious men and a lack of preparedness of the citizens. In her second volume of *Letters*, written in 1791 before her return to France, she had acknowledged the difficulties that were becoming apparent,[105] but had remained optimistic. She believed that people would never wish to return to despotism, and that this would be sufficient to guard against it. Evidently educated herself, and associating with the educated elite of the middle class in France, Williams only later realized the lack of dissemination of the philosophical ideas, that had initiated the reforms attempted by the first revolutionary leaders. These included her friends among the Girondins, and those moderates who hoped for a constitutional monarch with broad representation from the departments of France constituting the ruling assembly.

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[105] Commenting on the National Assembly, she observed that it did not display the same "talents" as previously, and could "boast no transcendent genius" (II: 102).

Social Context of Williams's Life 1787-1791

In the two years prior to *Julia*, Williams continued to socialize and host gatherings that extended into several different circles. There is evidence that many of Williams's friends were radicals who favored the virtues of political reform. In the years between the publication of her poem on the slave trade and her departure for France in 1790, Williams extended her circle to include those who spoke and wrote about the virtues of political change. They included William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Holcroft, John Horne Tooke, Joel Barlow, Thomas Paine, John Hurford Stone, and Granville Sharpe. Little is yet known about the nature of her interaction with such active literary and political intellectuals. However, it may be inferred that she became increasingly more acquainted with the theories of those who were to participate through their writings and/or actions in the political turmoil in Europe in the 1790s. As supportive of independence for the American colonies as she was, they were as interested in political experimentation, and freedom of expression as she showed herself to be in the closing comments of her 1790 letters chronicling events and reactions in France. Having previously praised acceptance of the colonies' right to their own form of government, she criticized England's right to be "angry, because they (the new French Assembly), think proper to try another system of government themselves" and asks, "Why should they not be suffered to make an experiment in politics?" (135). Following the influence of her acquaintances, and of her reading during the closing years of the 1780s, Williams embarked on another mission that would last the rest of her life. She permeated this focus of her life with the same kind of religious fervor that had marked her as an apostle of the creed of Sensibility noted in her earlier work.

Of all her acquaintances from these years only one, Dr. John Moore, provides a lengthy personal, although satirical, assessment of her. Sometime in the preparation years of the 1786 volumes of her poetry, Williams made the acquaintance of Moore. As noted earlier in this chapter, several letters have survived resulting from his introduction of her to Robert Burns. Moore would no doubt have been supportive of her anti - slavery poem of 1787 since in the same year he published *Zelucco*, which also attacked the traffic. Josiah Wedgwood was evidently in contact with her concerning her interest in reforms in the slave trade since he later provided her with cameos of a slave being emancipated to distribute in France (*Souvenirs* 19).

At this time too Samuel Rogers entered her life. A letter of November 1787, from Kippis communicates Williams's request that Rogers have tea with her in Southampton Row. They were of the same age and Woodward notes that they became close friends. Williams was then associating other acquaintances of Rogers among who were William Godwin, John Towgood, Mary Wollstonecraft, Laetitia Barbauld and Hurford Stone. Another circle with which she was familiar was that of Edward Jerningham, who knew several of the friends of Johnson, Hannah More, Elizabeth Carter, and Fanny Burney (Woodward 27-30).

The contents of the letters between Williams and Anna Seward dating from this period indicate some of her social contacts, and also the type of correspondence in which she was engaged, and the extent to which her intellectual interests had evolved. They range over comments on the work of past and present poets, artists and musicians. Seward writes of Boyd's translation of Dante, comparing it to that of William Hayley, and advises Williams to avoid too much correspondence with George Hardinge since he seemed unaware that private letter writing might reduce her productivity as a published author (III: 16). In passing on information about another mutual acquaintance, Dr. Whalley, who was then vacationing in France, she refers to the manner in which a knowledge of Petrarch will enhance his appreciation of the River Sorgue (II: 78). In a letter of December 25th, 1787, Seward refers to other mutual acquaintances in the form of two soldiers serving with the British army in America and their love interests. She comments on Williams's awareness of her appreciation of the virtue of constancy "so rare in these gross times" (391). She refers to her objection to Samuel Johnson's "uncandid and intolerant bluster against the Dissenters" (392) to which she had objected in the years before his death in 1784. No doubt his attitude would have been familiar to Williams when she met him in 1783. One of Godwin's biographer's, Kegan Paul,[106] noted that by 1789, Godwin and Holcroft were frequent visitors to tea at the Williams' home together with other male intellectuals.

Responses to Burke's Reflections

Reactions to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* occurred during the year in which Williams completed her brief stay in England after her return late in 1790. During the time that Williams lived in England, from her birth to 1790, Edmund Burke, who, as an Anglican, opposed the radical dissenting group among whom she was raised, was a member of the House of Commons. As a Whig he "articulated many of the fundamental assumptions that would come to characterize modern constitutional regimes," (Kramnick 1994: 9) and supported "the ideal of an independent commons" (15) against royal patronage. However, he was opposed to a change in the electoral system that left many disfranchised. Among this group, of course, were the radical dissenters like Kippis, Priestley, and Price whose thoughts, as noted in Chapter III, had influenced Williams's formative years. She would have been well aware of the agitation by such dissenters in both England and America for redress of a system, which taxed those who were left without representation, allowing only a narrow franchise. Her support for the independence of the American colonies was evident in her 1783 poem after peace with America.

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[106] Qtd. by Woodward 30.

In the last few years that Williams resided in London, Burke opposed the reform efforts of William Pitt, who sought to increase both urban and rural representation. In a speech against Repeal of the Test Act in 1790, Burke displayed his contemptuous and conservative antipathy to those who would not subscribe to the establishment church when he observed "of all abstract principles of natural rights which the dissenters rested on as their stronghold . . . were the most idle. (They) superseded society and broke asunder all the bounds which had formed the happiness of mankind for ages" (*Motion to Repeal laws Making it a Crime to hold Unitarian Views* 38). The views he attacked were held by Priestley and Price whose rhetoric he held responsible for encouraging the actions of the French in 1789. Later in 1791 Burke observed that the group he hated, the Unitarians, "were associated for the express purpose of proselytizing aiming to collect a multitude sufficient by force and violence to overturn the church, and this concurrent with a design to subvert the state" (38).

The timing of Price's speech, and its indication of the support for the French Revolution by liberal Dissenters (as they had supported, like Williams, the American Revolution), drove him to begin to set down his thoughts in *Reflections* in February 1790. The beliefs and principles set out by Price were clearly antithetical to Burke with his very different political orientation. Burke fervently believed that certain people were intended by God to govern, and that others were divinely placed in a hierarchical political state. Within his *Reflections*, he observe: "We are resolved to keep an established church, an established monarchy, an established aristocracy, and an established democracy, each in the degree to which it exists and no greater." To Burke, religion, an established state religion, was the basis of civil society and necessary to combat "the limitations of human nature and man's reason." He criticized the French for choosing to "act as if they had never been molded into a civil society, and had everything to begin anew." Such a situation was an anathema to a man who believed that it would be disastrous to attempt to suddenly change a government and society that "were fragile and complex entities, the product of slow growth and experience." His fear that the Revolution would cross the channel is evident in the rhetoric of his *Reflections*.

Approximately seventeen responses were published in support of Burke's position; a much smaller number opposed him. Like Paine, Priestley, Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Mackintosh, Williams's contribution was that of a supporter of the group that believed in the natural right of individuals to civil and religious liberty.

The several waves of the Revolution were to confirm some of Burke's worst fears about the lack of adequate foundation for the Revolution. The overly abstract philosophies, which failed to be workable, were scarcely understandable to the majority, who remained in ignorance of the idealistic principles of the intellectuals who began the first government with the hope that they could form a more liberal constitutional monarchy. As noted earlier in this chapter, it was with this moderate group, primarily the Girondins, that Williams socialized when she went to France and it was the ideas of some of their leaders like Brissot, whom she supported. All of this Williams was to document. She was to suffer deprivation and imprisonment. So too did Thomas Paine.

A comment appearing in *Gentleman's Magazine* in January 1791 indicates the antipathy to the intent of her writing by those who were not of the same ideological perspective as those who supported the Revolution. Unaware of the more committed and serious intent of Williams which was to become more evident as she continued to write, one correspondent scathingly observes:

> She saw it [the Revolutionary beginnings] and was glad . . . and perhaps rejoices that she has made a profitable book out of it. We, who have bestowed some attention to the calm reasonings of Burke and Calonne, must be permitted to entertain very different notions of the French Revolution, and indeed of the value of liberty . . . The pathetic tale of M. and Mme du F . . . is a very seasonable episode in the declamation against tyranny. The writer herself fears it has the air of a romance, and we should perfectly agree with her as she is used to such writing, that every incident is made to tally, did we not know from *undoubted* authority that the tale was true. (*Gentleman's Magazine* January 1791: 62)

A defense of Williams's letters appeared in the same magazine in April 1791:

> Could any mortal from such a review of it suppose the book worth reading? I was delighted with it . . . for I think I scarcely ever saw in equal compass, more happy expression of just and elegant sentiments, enhanced by the sweetest of feminine grace . . . What a person of unimpeached veracity gives to her country, and . . . as serious facts . . . he knows from *undoubted* authority to be true. (300)

Her later comments in *Souvenirs* when she reflects on her intent throughout her years of writing make clear this intent. She does not apologize for possible misleading remarks, or errors, excusing them as part of what was necessary to appeal to the hearts of the readers, to encourage them to think more seriously as they perused the appealing stories of romance and intrigue based on facts culled from her experiences in France.[107]

Williams's sympathy for the du Fossé family together with her support for radical dissenting thought, and encouragement felt after the success of the fledgling American state, doubtless formed the basis for her conviction in the initial stages of the Revolution. She moved in a circle of intellectuals, and the moderate Girondins, and was hopeful of the success of their theories. The evidence that she was aware of criticism from Burke and other politicians appears in the concluding letter of the first volume of *Letters*. As if responding to Burke's statement that: "the science of constructing a commonwealth or renovating it, or refining it, is like every other experimental science, not to be taught *a priori*" and of their Assembly, that "their liberty is not liberal. Their science is presumptuous ignorance. Their humanity is presumptuous ignorance" (*Reflections* 1790). Displaying an opposite view, Williams observes: "since the Assembly does not presume to set itself up as an example to this country, we seem to have little right to be furiously angry because they think proper to try another system of government themselves . . . Why should they not be suffered to make an experiment in politics?" (*Letters* 1790: 219-220) Exhibiting her subscription to the Rational Dissenting belief in human perfectibility, she asserts that: "To forbid under the pains and penalties of reproach, all attempts of the human mind to advance to greater perfection, seems to be proscribing every art and science" (221).

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[107] A reviewer of three volumes of commentary on the different views of opinions displayed by "*the most distinguished British Writers on the Subject of the French Revolution*," demonstrated that Williams was not alone in her hopes and feelings. He observed the fact that some "grossly erred in the expectations" formed of the Revolution, "we think it more honourable to have erred with Fox than to have thought more correctly with Burke . . .since the French revolution, in its first appearance, interested all the best sympathies of human nature, all those which are most the honour and the ornament of man; till in its ulterior progress, it outrages every generous, every tender sentiment [when] Liberty hid her head and Philanthropy turned pale." (*Critical Review*, May 1812: 365-66*)*

Burke's *Reflections* were published on November 1st, 1790. Williams's *Letters* written in the summer were probably published in late December judging by the reviews which appeared in *Gentleman's Magazine* in January of 1791 indicating that she probably had access to Burke's text as her book was about to go to press.

Williams would probably have been familiar with the responses to Burke. In his letter to Burke "occasioned by his *Reflections*," Joseph Priestley is critical of Burke's negativity with regard to reforming attempts by the French. Priestley notes that Burke questions whether the French nation "is justifiable in their attempts to change their arbitrary form of government for another which they deem more favourable to their interests and rights"(iv).[108] In suggesting that they are, Priestley notes that it is not a question of whether they have "taken the best methods" but whether it is worth "aiming at it." He concludes that "if they succeed in establishing a free government, they will be applauded . . . if they fail, they will be condemned for precipitancy and folly" (iv). Priestley draws attention to the members of the new French Assembly indicating that "it was a great work to concur in the regeneration of France in founding liberty there and creating laws and manners" (viii). Also that the majority of people who composed the new government "had the purest intentions" and gave pleasure to the friends of liberty, "while giving pain to Mr. Burke and some others." Priestley finds it "unaccountable" that Burke could have been a friend of the American revolution and yet an enemy of the French one.

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[108] Joseph Priestley: *Letters to the Right Honorable Edmund Burke occasioned by his Reflections* (London, 1791).

In his *Vindiciae Gallicae*, James Mackintosh also includes comments like those of Williams although he, like Priestley, provides a reasoned intellectual argument rather than the narrative approach of Williams. He notes the justification for the French attempt, as did Williams. In commenting on Burke's "abhorrence for abstract politics, a predilection for autonomy and a dread of innovation," Mackintosh touches on the belief to which Williams subscribed of the ultimate perfectibility of humankind. Such people as Burke who he observes "neglect the progress of the human mind . . . see transient madness" when there are "bursts of action" involving the possibility of reform. He reminds his readers that it is hardly surprising that at his age Burke has abandoned "audacious novelties," and that he cannot realize that the reforming process will eventually sweep aside "learned sophistry and . . . powerful oppositions." Williams too had implied that people who objected to the events in France denied the need and the possible improvements brought by experimentation.

Like Priestley, Macintosh is surprised at the outrage shown by Burke against anyone who did not "execrate his own most enlightened and accomplished friends" believing anyone in opposition "devoted to odium and ignominy." Mackintosh perceives no reasoned argument in Burke's *Reflections*, but assesses the whole to be "dogmatical and authoritative" with the cause decided without discussion. He finds it odd that Burke has no consideration for the "famished peasants, the unemployed, those suffering from the "languishing commerce." Also that he possesses a "sensibility which seems scared by the homely miseries of the vulgar" while being "attracted to the splendid sorrows of royalty." A friend of liberty, he views Burke's diatribe as "contemptuous, illiberal and scurrilous" (111). Mackintosh criticizes Burke for being averse to the reforming intent, for being indignant about sentiments of liberty passing from "schools and closets to the Senate" (166). He questions why Burke cannot countenance the French attempt to experiment since the British Constitution had benefited from such trials to avoid despotism. He states that the French have as much right to "invigorate the spirit of freedom," and to follow a vision.

Despite his criticism of Burke, Macintosh was to later recant like others once the Revolution became anarchical. Though disillusioned, Williams continued to write of the possible future triumphs of "liberty." Unlike the others who defended France's right to attempt change, she never doubted that eventually a more equitable form of government would prevail since like her adherence to the civilizing role of sensibility, she retained her faith in humanity's ultimate perfectibility.

The only other female to write an extensive rebuttal of Burke's position was Williams's friend, Mary Wollstonecraft [109] who had become acquainted and intellectually and religiously comfortable with the Dissenting group in Newington

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[109] Letters to Ruth Barlow, wife of Joel Barlow, American representative to the National Assembly in 1791, from both of them show them to have been mutual friends in 1794. (Kurtz *Four New Letters* 1936)

Green when she attempted to set up a school with her sisters. She would have attended Dr. Price's chapel there, associated with James Burgh and his wife and joined in the home gatherings common among the Rational Dissenters where politics, religion, and education were discussed among men and women. Burke denied the doctrine of perfectibility and the rights of man that the reforming dissenters espoused, and accurately prophesied terror and chaos in France. Like Williams, Wollstonecraft believed that ignorance and arbitrary governments were to blame for limiting individual progress. She opposed Burke's belief in a natural superiority in an aristocratic elite, and his support of them terming them "emasculated" by hereditary effeminacy (*Vindication of the Rights of Men* 92). Her thoughts were in agreement with the Dissenters that both at the top and bottom of the social scale were people of idleness. She also contradicted Burke's glowing appraisal of chivalry in his *Reflections* by which he stated that chivalry civilized power.

Wollstonecraft thought the chivalry Burke espoused was callous and indifferent to the subjugation and abuse of women (26). In a comment similar to that of Macintosh, she observed: "your tears are reserved, very naturally considering your character for the declamation of the theatre, or for the downfall of queens, whose rank alters the nature of folly and throws a veil over vices that degenerate humanity" (25).

In her critique of Burke, Catharine Macaulay was not as supportive of the English Constitution as Williams, although she agreed that England did not have exclusive rights to 'liberty.' Macaulay asserted that she had always

> considered the boasted birthright [regarding freedom] of an Englishman, as an

> *arrogant* pretension, built on a *beggarly* foundation. It is a kind of arrogant pretension, because it intimates a kind of exclusion to the rest of mankind from the same privileges; and beggarly, because it rests our legitimate freedom on the *alms* of our princes. (32)

She also maintained, as did Williams, that the British

> cannot with any grounds of *reason* or *propriety*, set up our own constitution as the model which all other nations ought *implicitly* to follow, unless we are *certain* that it bestows the *greatest* possible happiness on the people which in the nature of things any government can bestow. (33)

Asserting that the French had the right to create a completely new constitution, she commented that the people were bound, if ever they should "assert their native right of forming a government for themselves . . .by no law of *duty* or *reason* to make use of old materials in the structure of their new constitution . . ." (34). Acknowledging the risks of change, she concludes that "people have often abused their power" sacrificing themselves and their "posterity to the *wanton will* of an individual" (95). Unlike Burke, she considers that the possible dangers should the French "fling off their new constitution and subject themselves to unequal forms of government, or even *tyranny*," should not be made a reason for avoiding the attempt to assert the legitimate "*will of the people*" (95).

In *Reflections*, Burke drew particular attention to the misfortunes of Marie Antoinette claiming that a more chivalric attitude would have caused a defense of the monarchy and especially of the queen. In a letter to the conservative Hannah More, Horace Walpole, who viewed Wollstonecraft and Williams as subversive, comments: "Adieu, thou excellent woman! thou reverse of that hyena in petticoats, Mrs. Wollstonecraft, who to this day discharges her ink and gall on Marie Antoinette, whose unparalleled sufferings have not yet staunched that Alecto's blazing ferocity" (*Letters* XV 338). Commenting on the arrest of Paine supporters, Walpole observes: "Mrs Barbauld and Miss Helen Maria Williams will probably have subjects for elegies" (XV: 25). In August 1792, he noted: "It is better to thank Providence for the tranquility and happiness we enjoy in this country, in spite of the philosophizing serpents we have in our bosom, the Paines, the Tookes, and the Wollstonecrafts" (*Letters* XVI:131).

Williams did not rush back to the "tranquility and happiness" Walpole and Seward identify as common to life in Britain, even when she began to detect indications of problems to come after her initial elated responses. She was to return to write further commentaries about the effects of the revolution on all spheres of society. In her observations of the situation in France between 1790 and 1791, Williams focused not only on the opinions of her politically involved associates, but--as noted in allusions made earlier in this chapter--she also recorded the effects of the revolution on the people generally. In her poem, *The Bastille*, in her novel *Julia*, Williams asserted that as a result of the elimination of rank, the peasant father would no longer have to fear that his children would be threatened by the abuse created by the exploitation of the majority prior to the revolution (*Julia* II: 222). In *Letters*, she delights in the fact that "the life of a citizen is now considered of some value, and the poor people on foot cannot be trampled upon, by the horses of the rich people in carriages, with the same impunity as formerly" (II 52). Unlike Wollstonecraft, Williams conveys her attitude to French political change subtly, interspersing her use of the style of a romance, an adventure, a memoir to enter the conscience of her readers – especially females who may not otherwise have read much about politics, radical or otherwise. Had she not done so she would have been vilified at an earlier stage in her commentaries to the degree experienced by Mary Wollstonecraft, and her writing would probably not have been read as widely as it evidently was.

Conclusion

The change in the direction of Williams's literary career signaled the beginning of her involvement and journalistic-style commentary on French politics during the several stages of revolution from 1789 to 1819. In September 1791 she responded to a letter from the *Société des Amis de la Constitution*[110] in Rouen praising her first volume of *Letters* which were seen as publicizing the positive aspects of the revolution. In her response, she provides an indication of her attitude of sensibility and support for civil liberty--one which she was to maintain. She wrote that the effect of the events she had witnessed were not just "*un sujet de raisonnement mais de sentiment encore. Car pour sentir le bonheur général, il n'est pas nécessaire de posséder la sagesse d'un philosophe, il suffit d'avoir la sensibilité d'une femme.*"[111] [a concern of reason but also of feelings. Because to sense the general happiness, it is not necessary to have the wisdom of a philosopher, it is sufficient to have the sensibility of a woman.]

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[110] On October 12th 1791, Williams informed Hester Lynch Piozzi that: "*The société des amis de la Constitution* at Rouen sent me a very flattering letter of thanks for my french journal, and ordered three thousand copies of an answer I sent them, to be printed." She signed the letter "Nell Williams" (*The Piozzi Letters*. 1989: 371-2).

Enthusiastically she observed:

> *Née dans un pays libre, pourrais-je voir sans attendrissement les bienfaits de la liberté . . . Puisse la nouvelle Législature soutenir avec fermeté les principes de cette Constitution qui consacrere la première Assemblée Nationale de la France à l'admiration éternelle de la postérité. . . .*[may I witness like you] *la France et l'Europe suivent l'exemple que les peuples les plus éclairés leur donnent et qu'ainsi la Révolution française soit l'époque illustre d'où le genre humain apprenne qu'il ne fut pas créé pour l'esclavage, la haine et la misère, mais pour la liberté, la fraternité, et le bonheur* (45-46). [Born in a free country could I see without emotion the benefits of liberty . . . Let us hope the new Legislature will firmly establish the principles of the constitution which will consecrate the first National Assembly of France to the admiration of posterity . . . France and Europe follow the example that the most enlightened give them and that the French revolution will bring an illustrious epoque in which humanity no longer thinks it is born for slavery, cruelty and misery, but for liberty, brotherhood and happiness].

In the following chapter I trace her increasing involvement with those she thought "*les plus éclairés*," the Girondin faction, and the challenge to her principles by the anarchy which followed their demise.

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[111] Qtd. by Woodward from a letter from Williams, September 13, 1791 to "The Society of the Friends of the Constitution" at Rouen (45).

CHAPTER VI

An Apologist for Liberty and Humanity

1792-1794

> What has become of the transport which beat high in every bosom, when an assembled million . . . vowed . . . in noble fraternity and union--an eternal federation . . . this was indeed the golden age of the revolution--but it is past!--the enchanting spell is broken, and the fair scenes of beauty and of order . . . are transformed into desolation.
>
> Williams *Letters* 1796, III: 6[112]

> The ignorance of the multitude is the power of anarchists as well as despots . . . they make war on philosophy which teaches that universal reason is the only basis of liberty; and thus deride any plan of education, and deny the ability of public schools[113]
>
> Jacques-Pierre Brissot *Letters*, 1796, I: 234

> Upon the whole, the cause of liberty is no less sacred, nor her charms less divine because sanguinary monsters and sordid savages have defiled her temple and insulted her votaries.
>
> Williams *Letters* 1796, IV: 178

After her reentry to the social circles of Marie-Jeanne Roland and Jacques-Pierre Brissot on her return to France in 1792, Williams became further immersed in the hopes and ideals of the small group of bourgeois intellectual politicians variously termed *moderés*, Brissotins, Rolandists or Girondins. Williams identified the other leading party in 1790-1791 as the *enragés*. Her perception of their difference was that the *enragés* placed the "declaration of the rights above the constitution," while the *moderés* placed the constitution above the declaration[114] (*Letters* 1792, II: 108)]. Williams's earlier experiences of France had exposed her to "scenes of general felicity" causing her to speculate that "a period was approaching more favorable . . . to the general happiness of the human race; when the crooked subtleties of politics and open violation of justice" would pass away and the "fond speculations of the philosopher, the golden dream of the moralist would become historical fact" (II: 76).

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[112] Subsequent references to Williams's *Letters* are from the 1790, 1792 and 1796 editions of her eight-volumes of commentary on events from 1790 to 1796.

[113] Jacques-Pierre Brissot quoted in Williams's *Letters* (1796 I: 234).

Following her experience of salon discussions on political issues, Williams recognized that the scope of the dreams and speculations of the philosophers, although communicated to others beyond their immediate circles, were not easily comprehended by the majority of the uneducated citizenry, who would determine the direction of some of the political change. In *Souvenirs*, she observed that the abstract and learned discussions about the principles of liberty occurred in Paris salons, and that such principles spread to a majority of the people, who were eager for changes in government. She compared the Revolution to a powerful machine for which the people became the fuel (12).

The inability of the Gironde to adequately publicize their aspirations and the prevailing lack of understanding by the people of the complexities inherent in political change aided the establishment of a new form of despotism. It was to be born from the Montagnard/Mountain faction, the kernel of which consisted of members of the Paris commune and the Parisian deputies (Doyle 194). Describing the new constitution in France a contributor to the *New Annual Register* of 1792,[115] asserts that:

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[114] Her comment that each side was as "dogmatical as the former doctors of the Sorbonne" (109), presaged the ensuing conflict and eventual anarchy. She also noted the respect for the Hall of the Jacobins at this time which was said to the "cradle and sanctuary of French Liberty" (110).

> The weakness of the executive government laid it open on every occasion to the assaults of faction; and had this cause not operated internally to the overthrow of the government, it would have equally have accomplished that end, by impeding the exertions of ministers for the defence of the country. The *patriotic societies* too (as they were erroneously termed) contained in themselves the seeds of anarchy and confusion. With the constituent assembly the sun of liberty set . . . The new assembly consisted chiefly of country gentlemen, whose inexperience in political affairs rendered them incompetent to act for themselves and made them passive dupes of a party, which, though not numerous compensated for this defect by activity and boldness. (116-7).

Anarchy descended in 1793 incited by conspiracy theories during the ascendancy of the Mountain, who were skillful at manipulating public opinion, and by others who had remained in the Jacobin Club. The commentator noted above also observed: "The editors of newspapers, and the publishers of periodical libels, were, by the singular change in the affairs of France, elevated to the rank of senators, and soon assumed to themselves the authority of sovereigns" (1792:116); and continues: "The great force of misfortune to France, from the commencement of the revolution, has been the prevailing apprehension . . . of a return of despotism. This has enabled a vicious faction to act upon their fears, to keep the public mind in perpetual agitation" (116).

Despite signs of increasing intimidation against citizens suspected of being less than supportive of the new order, and foreigners who might be part of a royalist conspiracy, reveries on "liberty" still entered Williams's mind, and expressions of sensibility overflowed in such comments as:

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[115] Possibly Williams herself. Woodward provides evidence that Williams contributed articles on France to the *New Annual Register* for several years (141)

> When the French have passed the 'wild abyss', then will Europe discern and judge whether the product of their new political creation be happiness or misery . . . whether the theory of equality . . . can be reduced to practice . . . or whether it will prove a thought beyond the reach of our souls and melt away to nothing . . . whether anarchy shall continue [or] sublime liberty shall descend like the guardian genius of mankind. (1796 IV: 73)

Williams recalled comments from literature or friends on the topic, which preoccupied her. From Addison she recollected: "O, Liberty, thou goddess heav'nly bright, / Profuse of bliss, and pregnant with delight!" (1792 II: 76). Similar to Williams's view was that of Marie-Jeanne Roland. She acknowledged that: "Enamoured of liberty, the value of which I learnt from reflection, I view the revolution with transport, persuaded that it was the epoch of the subversion of despotism" (1796, I: 203).[116] Association with radical thought among Rational Dissenters and discussions in intellectual, literary circles caused Williams to gravitate towards the milieu of Roland and Brissot reinforcing her predisposition to idealize individual liberty. Like them, she underestimated the problems accompanying radical political change.

In the present chapter, I trace Williams's attitude towards her personal concept of liberty. It was to be challenged by the "jacobin fanatics of liberty" from whom another type of "liberty" surfaced - one capable of making the "blood freeze in the veins" (1795, III: 6) of the early "martyrs to liberty." This test of her political ideals was to occur during the evolution of Robespierre's paradoxically despotic "freedom" as practiced by the "faction of anarchists" among the Montagnards[117] (Feb. 10, 1796 IV: I).

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[116] From her final speech of defense before her execution late in 1793. She also expressed her support for the principles of fellow Girondins whom she characterized as "humane republicans" (279).

As indicated in previous chapters, I contend that Williams exhibited the fervor of a publicist of radical politics. Continuing aesthetic discourse in the mode of sensibility that characterized her earlier work, she frequently annotated her accounts with opinions intended to engage her readers' intellect through their emotions, rather than persuade them by factual accounts, or by solely intellectual argument. She provided examples of reactions from a section of humanity under the stress of a destabilized political system. Her *Letters*, replete with eyewitness accounts, were intended to appeal to those interested in the events as they occurred, those used to reading sentimental novels, travelogues and memoirs, and those more seriously inclined with regard to political change and the potential for women's involvement. She was insistent that her texts were not like popular memoirs and travelogues, but were intended to provide an authenticate documentation of events and responses (1796 I: 2) since she had been "witness of the scenes" and "known personally to all the principal actors" (2). When she could not provide personal accounts, she appended the letters of friends who were able to provide the details she wished to convey (1796 III: 28).[118] Another concern of hers was to contradict the criticisms common in political circles in England, and from those circulated by pro-royalist refugees.

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[117] Williams noted the difference between members of the jacobin society at meetings she attended: "*Je fus plusieurs fois avec elle aux séances des jacobins, non pas les jacobins de la race du Robespierre, mais du temps où Brissot et Vernigaud montaient à la tribune*" [I had been with her (Roland) several times at meetings of jacobins, not the jacobins of the type of Robespierre, but of that shown by Brissot and Vernigaud at the tribune"] (*Souvenirs* 72).

Since she believed that an appreciation of spirituality, literature, science and politics was necessary to the citizen of a more "civilized" state, Williams expressed herself in relation to these in her discourse. She focused the readers' attention on the need to consider these if a more enlightened civil society was to emerge. An example of this is evident when she asserted that "had the Parisians attended to the political duties that were required of them in exchange for their enjoyment of political rights" they would not have suffered the "tyrants whom they ought to have crushed" (1796 I: 85-6). Another example of her wish to focus the readers' attention on the need to become more politically informed is evident in her criticism of Britain's political policies. Asserting that it "could be stigmatized as a barbarous nation" because of the slave trade, she advised that until this abuse no longer "stain[ed] the British name," her country should be "less censorious of other nations" (1796 IV: 177).

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[118] A letter of Jan. 25, 1793 precedes a series of letters intended to provide "a high degree" of "gratification" (29) to her readers through accounts of a friend's visit to the armies engaged in the 1792 campaign.

Aesthetics and Revolutionary Images

To convey more effectively the revolutionary images of which she was continually aware, Williams used a variety of devices making her discourse subjective and intimate in its appeal. Her voice is evident throughout. Citing McGann's recognition of Williams's use of "annotation" to punctuate her translation of *Paul and Virginie*, and create a commentary on Bernadin de St. Pierre's narrative, I asserted in Chapter III that her assessments on political and social issues in the form of opinions and reveries form an extension of McGann's contention. Williams's use of this technique indicates another aspect of her connectedness to themes evident in her discourse. In *Woman Travel Writers, Landscape and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* (1995), Elizabeth Bohls maintains that Williams by "representing the Revolution in the language of aesthetics, but doing so for such an emphatically particular, engaged position, . . . rejects the dominant paradigm of the disinterested aesthetic subject" (124). As I indicate through examples of aesthetic engagement and subjective rhetoric, this was evidently a primary concern of Williams herself. Bohls includes Williams in a group of eighteenth century writers who "struggled to appropriate the powerful language of aesthetics, written by men from a perspective textually marked as masculine" (3). She also notes that they challenged three of the "founding assumptions" of modern aesthetics: the idea of "universally applicable generalizations about 'the' subject of aesthetic appreciation, . . . disinterested contemplation, . . . [and] the autonomy of the aesthetic domain from moral, political, or utilitarian concerns and activities" (7). Bohls contends that in the traditional paradigm, the "subject or perceiver is constructed in mainstream, male-authored eighteenth-century aesthetic writing through a process that entails disqualifying the vast majority of subjects and falsely universalizing the judgement of the few" (7).I contend Williams fuses the areas, joining the style of romance with serious consideration of the main struggle involving the ideologies of an emerging and diverse group producing a new class of statesman. Her writing is appealing and capable of being absorbed by a wider audience than traditional, male-dominated philosophical discourse.

In acknowledging Williams's aesthetic engagement with the political, and immersion "in the language of landscape aesthetics" (108), Bohls characterizes her as a writer who "mobilize[d] aestheticized nature in a sustained . . . effort to make sense of historic events in France and naturalize them for the British reader" (108). As I observed in Chapters III and IV, Williams attempted to appeal to the intellect of her readers through their emotions, through the eighteenth century notion of the "*cœur sensible.*"

Throughout the *Letters* from 1793 to 1795, Williams continued to intersperse her accounts of the "foul tragedy" in which "liberty [was] innocent of the outrages committed under its borrowed sanctions" (1796 I: 256), with reveries, and opinions. At times, she lectures her readers--always with the aesthetic, subjective appeal surfacing at intervals. By such strategy, she avoids presenting the acceptably feminine or the traditionally masculine, philosophical argument, or "objective" factual account. Her language, suffused with sensibility, with evidence of the "feeling heart," is picturesque and evocative whether "drawing the veil" (1796 I: 69) over or back from extremes of joy or sorrow. She portrays the struggle of virtue and vice as it affects a range of humanity in the stress of the events. At the same time, her use of aesthetic appeal allows her to suggest the transcendence not only of Nature, but also of the political ideals she espouses. Throughout the difficult stages of the French "experiment" in abandoning the feudal state for the increased civil liberty of republicanism, Williams attempts to create the enthusiastic "transport" she feels when her political ideals were in ascendancy. With equal depth of feeling, she submerges her reader in images of horror, injustice and cruelty as she contrasts the type of liberty she and her associates espouse with that resulting from the "liberty" indulged in by the tyranny of anarchists.

The epistolary format while immediate and intimate in its appeal, allowed her the reflection of hindsight since the letters were sometimes written months after the events, recalled from memory after the danger of being "suspected" had caused her to destroy documents composed prior to her imprisonment in late 1793. Her writing has been described as subjective and partisan. Yet a survey of her work indicates an intent to publicize the vision of a more progressive state of "public virtue" (1796 I: 258). This gives a consistency to her rhetoric as she projects libertarian principles and the problematic nature of their application during her observations of citizens attempting to come to terms with the sudden fracturing of French politics. Reflecting on the type of perspective necessary to a fairer assessment of the Revolution, Mary Wollstonecraft in her preface to an *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794), viewed its stages as:

> the natural consequence of intellectual improvement, gradually proceeding to perfection in the advancement of communities, from a state of barbarism to that of polished society overthrowing ... gothic brutality and ignorance. (v)

Williams's background in Rational Dissent led her to a belief in the perfectibility of humankind espoused by other radicals such as Wollstonecraft, Condorcet and Godwin.[119]

Chris Jones indicates that she is "easy to criticize, partial towards her Girondin friends and naïve in her enthusiasm" (*Radical Sensibility* 1993: 137). However to overstate her naiveté--by which she and other idealists generally are often characterized--is to ignore consideration of certain motivating principles. These principles included a commitment to liberal humanitarian political and social issues "unsophisticated by old prejudices" (Wollstonecraft *An Historical and Moral View* 1794: v).

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[119] Condorcet was of the opinion that "hopes for the future of the human race could be subsumed under. . . the abolition of inequality between nation . . . the progress of equality within each nation . . . and the true perfection of mankind" (*The Future Progress* cited by Goodell: 225). In *Political Justice*, Godwin noted that "man is perfectible . . . it does not mean he is capable of being brought to perfection. But the word . . . express[es] the faculty of continually being made better and receiving perpetual improvement" (44).

The "Flights of Rhetoric" in Williams's Apology for Liberty

In *Edmond Burke, Modernity, Politics and Aesthetics* (1994), Stephen White observes the aesthetic-affective dynamic stressing the importance of feeling or sentiment in political judgement, in Burke's "notoriously rambling, affect-laden prose" (2). In her review of White's contentions, Linda Zerilli observes that in his *Reflections*, Burke's language "exceeds its ostensible empirical referent" (1997: 447) and indulges in "flights of rhetoric." In the course of this chapter, I provide examples of the descriptive, sensitive, imaginative style of Williams which parallels that identified in Burke by White and Zerilli. Both Williams and Burke equated order and beauty with the sublime. However, Williams differed from Burke in her concept of "order." A proponent of the traditional hierarchy and conventions in church and state, Burke used his rhetoric to plead the cause of the established order. Williams used hers to suggest the need for reform of church and state hegemony. One such example that encompasses her feelings before and after the anarchy that challenged her ideals appears in a letter of January 1793 in which she laments when reflecting on the first anniversary of the Revolution:

> This was indeed the golden age of the revolution.--But it is past!--the enchanting spell is broken and the fair scenes of beauty and of order, through which imagination wandered, are transformed into desolation and wilderness, and clouded by the darkness of the tempest [of anarchy]. (1796 III: 6)

It is my contention that a strong sense of aestheticism creating similar "flights" into the imaginative realm of descriptive prose informed Williams's response to all the stages of the Revolution. One reason for the increased emotion evident in Burke's response to events parallels Williams's experience. White observes that it was the "affective-jolt" which enabled Burke to "speak definitively on France;" a response to the problems of Madame Parisot's account to him of the "Great Fear" (64) that to Burke was not just "another piece of political news" (64). It was the response to the plight of the du Fossé family, which gave Williams the "affective-jolt" to become involved in the political affairs of France. The solution to the problems of the du Fossé family, whose happiness was important to her, caused her to observe that a situation, which could benefit them, must be beneficial to all.

Williams's use of a picturesque, emotive style providing "flights of rhetoric" is evident throughout her *Letters*. A different, less literary style appears in a letter to her added to the fourth of the first set of the 1790 to 1796 volumes. Although the writer is also an apologist for liberty, he presents a more reasoned, factual argument to support his assertions. This particular letter not only provides an example of another style in epistolary writing used for voicing political concerns, but it is also indicative of the information Williams received from men similarly involved in publicizing radical politics, and exhibits the type of political philosophies to which she was exposed. The inclusion of this letter in volume four of *Letters* serves to prove that Williams's involvement in radical political issues was acknowledged. The detail provided to her also shows a respect for her contribution and understanding of the situation from the perspective of a man who concurred with the support provided by Price and his fellow radicals for the long term goals of a growing category of new liberal politicians. Williams acknowledged in her eulogy of Andrew Kippis in 1796 (*Gentleman's*

Magazine January 1796: 66) that he had communicated with her and had been supportive during the Terror. I believe that it was connections with him, and unacknowledged correspondents like the one alluded to above, who had been so influential in her earlier years that, together with her Girondin French associates, aided her persistence in support of radical politics in the 1790s.

That Williams was aware of the responses of a variety of men and women to Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* is evident from the content of the anonymous letter. The unknown author also traces the responses to Burke of Mackintosh, Paine, Christie, Macaulay Graham, Wollstoncraft (sic), Brooke Boothby, and Rous (220). Burke proved himself one of the most vociferous critics of Rational Dissenting support for the French "experiment" through his attack on the sermon of Richard Price[120], friend of Williams's mentor, Andrew Kippis. Williams was to regret that the prediction made by Burke (*Reflections* 91) about "gallows at every vista" was eventually reflected in the use of the guillotine. Burke warned that if for lack of proper order the "present project of a republic should fail, all securities in a moderated freedom fail along with it; all the indirect restraints which mitigate despotism are removed" (202). His comments on "liberty" parallel those of Williams when he observes: "Grand swelling sentiments of liberty, I am sure I do not despise. They warm the heart; they enlarge and liberalize out minds" (263). He cautions that to give freedom requires "no great prudence" only to "let go the rein." However, to form a "*free government*; . . . to temper together those opposite elements of liberty and restraint in one consistent work, requires much thought, deep reflection, a sagacious, powerful, and combining mind" (263).

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[120] A sermon entitled *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* delivered by Richard Price in support of the French National Assembly at the Dissenters' meeting house in Old Jewry on November 4, 1789 (Keane 287).

Although convinced of the wisdom of pursing ambitious legislative change, William's correspondent noted above, provided her with an assessment of attitudes in Britain and defended French attempts to radically alter their government. However, his account of the history of the Revolution to 1793, provided evidence of the problems Burke perceived would follow lack of adequate planning and the dominance of sentiment over reason. He notes that:

> the people divided amongst themselves and became the prey of factious men; when a minority, both in the Convention and the country at large, governed the majority, subdued by fear . . . [the progress of anarchy] marked by the massacre of prisoners the second of September 1792, . . . the pillage of the grocers, the 23rd and 26th February 1793. . . . [In] the course of four years [France] passed from despotism, through the stage of limited monarchy and republicanism to anarchy. (1796: 180)

Unlike that of Williams, the unknown author's style is primarily a projection of perceived "objective" historical "fact" punctuated by his criticisms of errors he considers had been made by both the French and British. However, when mentioning "Liberty" of which, he reminds the reader, Britain enjoyed the blessings and had forgotten the price it cost their ancestors to obtain (227), he uses more figurative language indulging the "freedom of epistolary intercourse" (Burke 21) to "throw out" his thought and feelings (21). As a reminder of the struggle to bring about beneficial progress in politics, and excusing the chaos, he comments that " no people ever traveled to the temple of Liberty by a path strewn with roses" (*Letters*: 1796 III 227). Also, at the close of the letter he quotes Addison and Courtnay on Liberty (271). Like Williams when she makes apologies for the problems created by attempts to institute a more liberal political system, he places the events on the "great scale" (263) of political evolution noting that France could not be blamed if

> [Liberty] had not been able, all at once, to carry into practice the sublimest principles of justice and wisdom ever adopted by mankind . . . Her errors will pass away; . . . her *principles* will be immortal, and her declaration of the rights of man will perish only with the human race. (262)

The author notes with surprise the "dubious light" in which the Revolution was received in England. He is also critical of the influence of inaccurate newspaper accounts of the revolution and their effects--except for the *Morning Chronicle*-- which reduce understanding of the broader implications of political change in France. While excusing "unprincipled statesmen," and the "lower and ignorant class," he criticizes the "middling" class – "the most disinterested and the most judicious class of society" (156-7). He insists that the people should have conferred their confidence on the "most enlightened" (163) in the Assembly, Brissot, Condorcet, Sieyes, Buzot, Petion, and Roland, and bemoans their silencing (177). Contending that the political situation in France and England cannot be compared, he contends that England had neither the "mass of abuses to change," nor the "shocking inequality which disfigured human society in France" (252). He is of the opinion that despotism had "destroyed the morals of the [French] people making them unfit for a system of extensive liberty" (254). Williams conveys a similar thought observing that the "theory is beautiful, the principles are sublime, but many of the actors are detestable, and it is a system of which the present race is not worthy" (26).

In the Preface to the *Revolt of Islam*, Shelley expressed similar views. After contending that the French Revolution could be considered as "one of those manifestations of a general state of feelings among civilized mankind produced by a defect of correspondence between the knowledge existing in society and the improvement or general abolition of political institutions," he observes:

> The revulsion occasioned by the atrocities of the demagogues, and the re-establishment of successive tyrannies in France was terrible . . . Can he who the day before was a trampled slave suddenly become liberal-minded, forbearing and independent? This is a consequence of the habits of a state of society to be produced by resolute perseverance and indefatigable hope, . . . and the systematic efforts of generations of men of intellect and virtue. [On] the first reverses of hope in the progress of French liberty, the sanguine eagerness for the good overlapped the solution of these questions, and for a time extinguished itself in the unexpectedness of their results. (1816: 437)

He further notes that many of the "most ardent and tender-hearted of the worshippers of public good have been morally ruined by what a partial glimpse of the events they deplored appeared to show as the melancholy desolation of all their cherished hopes." Though "ardent and tender-hearted" (437), Williams did not decline into the "gloom and misanthropy" (437) that Shelley identified as pervasive in early nineteenth century politics. Despite the fact that she was afforded more than a glimpse of the "melancholy desolation" of anarchy, she remained faithful to her early ideals evolving into what I perceive to be an apologist for Liberty.

Williams as an Apologist for Liberty

The anarchy following failed attempts by Williams's associates among the Gironde to implement the constitution that the more moderate group in the Jacobin Society had helped to create, provided a challenge to her optimism about the early establishment of a liberal government based on Paine's *Rights of Man*[121]. This group of intellectuals and journalists--several of them exceptional orators (Scott and Rothaus 1985: 433) as Williams observed about Rabaut St-Etienne, Vergniaud and La Source---never formally became a political party. They "did not even vote as a bloc in the assembly, but comprised a loosely knit group of left-wing deputies, who met regularly for meals and in salons" (433). Williams assessed these defenders of individual freedom of conscience as those who truly understood the type of constitution required and who were fervent in their "love of liberty." She characterized them as not "sufficiently aware of the instability of popular favour" and the "precarious tenure by which they held it" (1796 I: 58-9).

Initially the Girondins supported a limited monarchy, but their ambivalence as to the direction of the Revolution weakened them. According to William Doyle, they "were attracted by the idea of doing nothing – keeping the king a hostage against future eventualities[122]" (194). They "posited themselves as popular leaders" trying to steer the revolution into a more democratic direction, but they "wavered from actually calling for a popular revolution against the monarchy" (Scott 434). At this stage Williams agreed with the idea of a constitutional monarchy similar to the English model, but noted that the Girondins were too careless. They failed to appeal more strongly to the people in a way that Jacobins like Marat did through both the Parisian and the provincial presses. Their influence degenerated quickly from the time in March 1792 when they had demonstrated that they could secure a majority of votes in the Assembly, and Brissot was the nation's most powerful deputy (434).

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[121] A document drafted mainly by Condorcet and supported by former royalist ministers like Marie-Jeanne Roland's husband, the former minister of the Interior.

Writing of the problem of "considering separately" the rapidly unfolding events between September 1792 and April 1793 during which Louis XVI was tried and executed, Williams acknowledged her inability to predict the future in the atmosphere of instability, "distrust and suspicion" (1796 IV: 75) that prevailed as anarchy evolved. However, she kept faith with her ideal. She comments: "Whatever have been the causes of this melancholy reverse, the true and genuine friend of liberty will not be much dejected" (75). She reasoned that tyrants are always temporary while "the light of reason," freedom and the people remain (75), and that "Providence takes too great care of the happiness of the world to suffer national crimes to pass unpunished" (75). Her conviction that the politics of liberty would eventually prevail was reinforced by the religious faith inculcated in her youth, and her poet's sense of the sublime in the "order" in matters both worldly and metaphysical. The present section provides further evidence of her response to events as they unfolded during the reign of Robespierre and his followers among the Jacobins and the Commune of Paris. They show her concern, her shocked reactions, but also her reconciliation of events and of people's responses to her libertarian principles.

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[122] Their apparent royalist sympathy led to suspicions that they might attempt to reinstate the former king in a limited constitutional monarchy similar to the English system.

After the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793, Williams observes that "feelings of the heart, which run a faster pace than the reasonings of the head, reject for a while all calculations of general good and evil, and melt in mournful sympathy [for Louis's execution]" (1796 III: 1-2). However, she advises reflection on the fact that "when we consider the importance which this event may have in its consequences we lose sight of the individual sufferer, to meditate on the destiny of mankind" (2). Unlike Williams, who sets the events in the context of their historical significance in social and political evolution, Grace Dalrymple Elliot, sometime mistress of the Prince of Wales and friend of the Duke of Orleans, provides a less reflective response:

> The day of the King's death was the most dreary I ever saw. The clouds seemed to mourn. Nobody dared appear, or at least look at each other. The cruel Jacobins themselves seem to fear each other's reproach. I was shut up all day. I heard nothing from Paris, nor did I wish to hear. I dreaded the idea of ever going there again. (*Journal* 1859: 87)

Horace Walpole, who approved the movement toward American independence, decried the French attempts at reform. He focused his response on an assessment of the king's character based on evidence from the interaction between the king and his sister close to the time of his death. He concludes: "If that was not the most sublime instance of perfect innocence ready prepared for death, I know not where to find one" (February 1793, *Letters* 1803: XV 179). After the death of Louis, Gouverneur Morris, United States minister to France during the Terror, ended his *Diary of the French Revolution* with a letter to Jefferson giving a factual account of the execution. He concluded that "the majority were not favourable to that severe measure [and] there was much grief" (1796 II: 602).

Having come to terms with the execution of Louis, Williams criticized the initial passivity in the reasoning of the people in general. She identifies it as the source of "almost all the evils" and comments:

> Finding themselves delivered from the oppression of the former government; concluding that no tyrant existed except such as bore the name of king, and persuaded that system could never return, they were careless whether the plain or the mountain[123] . . . held the reins of government. (1796 I: 85)

Williams reflects, in a manner reminiscent of Burke's reflections, on the later development of political consciousness of statesmen and citizens when a "long mournful experience" at length demonstrated to them that it was " not sufficient to feel the love of liberty, without making continual efforts to preserve it," (87) and "when the sacred code of freedom is violated in one point it results in the destruction of the whole" (88). She is also critical of the Plain representing several factions including the Girondins noting that an "ill-judged application of the principles of individual liberty, a too delicate regard for the rights of persons led the majority of the convention" (67) to disregard evidence of conspiracies until it was too late. However, subscribing to a sense of the inevitability of poetic justice, she contends that liberty would be "terribly avenged" when those who were negligent in government, and the people generally would suffer in the development of anarchy.

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[123] Williams defined the group of statesmen whom she identified as *moderés* (1792, II: 108). The *New Annual Register* for 1792 defines the opposing parties as follows: "The more moderate party, including Petion, Brissot, Vernigaud, [all friends of Williams]they derive appellation from the department of the Gironde, the deputies of which are among the leaders of the party. The opposite faction is called the Mountain, from its occupying the high seats in the hall of the convention" (1792: 182).

When a "more purely democratical" (IV 1796: 48) constitution was presented to the National Convention, there came the realization that the Mountain led by Robespierre were not going to agree, and "clouds of darkness still hung upon the future" (49). As she considered the developing instability, Williams identified the Mountain as "auxiliaries of the aristocracy" among the emissaries of French princes and foreign courts (49)--though with different intentions--as planning the massacre of the "national representation" and inciting the people to exercise their sovereignty (52). She compares her friends, whom she considers the true "friends of liberty," and the triumvirate of Robespierre, Marat and Danton, and annotates her record of the struggles between the factions with a metaphorical representation of the opposing groups:

> As well might they have compared the sun advancing in her majesty sharing the pestilential vapours from his orb, and spreading light over the horizon, to the angry and transient meteor which flashes across the sky, and which rises and sets in darkness. (50-51)

She accuses the society of Jacobins, which the followers of Brissot had unwisely abandoned, as " endeavoring to crush in its birth that liberty which they contributed to create," (55) and which they had for so long jealously guarded. Despite her support for the Girondins, and her faith in "liberty," Williams communicates a visionary reverie about the problem of establishing a new political system. She mused that although " a great experiment was about to be made for the future . . . it was impossible to reflect, without trembling anxiety, that the stake was human happiness, and the issue was doubtful, while all that could be calculated with certainty was that millions must perish in the trial" (IV 1796:11). By reminding her reader that although the principles of philosophers initiated the revolution, and that the change came because the old system could no longer be sustained, she seems to attempt to absolve those with whom she associated by concluding that there was an inevitability about the revolution. Certainly, several years of poor harvests, devaluation of the currency and a desire for a freer market system contributed to the demise of the rule by a minority aristocracy of birth. She associated her ideals with an "aristocracy of talents," and one of commerce each of which signaled progress that she regarded as doomed by the autocratic, unstable rule of Robespierre. Brissot, expressing a similar sentiment when commenting on the inability of the Mountain to control the dissemination of all knowledge, also observed:

> This is the reason why they are inveighing so continually against the aristocracy of genius. Alas! Why has knowledge only a metaphysical existence? Without complacency, would not these Vandals bring it to their control, if their destroying scythe could reach it? (1796, I: 234)

Brissot also cited the "ignorance of multitude as the mainspring of the power of the *anarchists*." He further observed that this faction made war on philosophy, which teaches us that universal reason is the only basis of liberty; and thus deride every plan of education, and deny the utility of public schools" (234). Williams was in agreement with both of these sentiments, as is shown by her support for public education plans in 1790, and her comment that the secret of tyranny is ignorance (*Souvenirs* 12).

Williams further reveals her wish to remind the reader of the place of the events of the 1790s in the broader historical context by encouraging them to consider that though the revolution was the "effect of imperious necessity":

> Whatever permanent good may result from a change of government, the temporary evil is so certain, that every age is disposed to leave that work to the succeeding generation . . . They may plant the seeds of posterity sown with toil and trouble and bathed in blood . . . but the blooming vegetation and the golden fruit belong to another race of men. (IV: 1793 12)

By April 1793 Marat increasingly agitated against the Gironde, and conducted acts with "all the wisdom that belongs to villainy" (70). In her denigration of the Montain, Williams accused him of prolonging the reign of anarchy since he believed "his power must cease with the establishment of order" (71). Turning again to thoughts of the repercussions on other countries of the attempt to establish a new constitution, she is confident that before the French "desire the nations to throw off the sovereignty of kings," they will be "careful to demonstrate that there is no tyranny in the sovereignty of the people" (71-2). Yet again, despite her optimism, she reveals her dismay that early in 1793 they have only proved "that the passage from despotism to liberty is long and terrible" (73).

Nevertheless, despite her increasing disappointment, Williams still continues to remind her readers about the inevitability of more liberal systems:

> Who, but the ardent mind, that even against hope, remains convinced that no design formed against liberty can eventually prosper, but would have considered himself already at the last pages of this romance of the republic when he beheld the state of desolation which has lately seemed to overpower it. (79-80)

As anarchy reigned and her associates among the Girondin deputies were arrested between 31st May and 2nd June 1793, Williams attempted to impress on her readers the characteristics of her friends in the Assembly. She characterizes them as statesmen "whose cultivated mind and enlightened conversation" in the salons and her home strengthened her optimism when it surfaced through feelings of sadness at their personal failures to influence the direction of "liberty." Despite the disunity created by their emphasis on individualism, "there were some general principles that the Girondins shared and made their network of friendships so politically potent" (Scott 435). They stood for representative democracy. They "believed in a democratic republic and of all French Revolutionary groups were the most receptive to American ideas." As Nichols observes a rather different citizenry prevailed in America since:

> the eighteenth century . . . witnessed the achievement of a political maturity and a dedication to self-government which was universal in the Atlantic seaboard colonies; [and] in the middle colonies there were appearing practical operating politicians who were adept at flexible and expedient management and who eventually were to set the political pace of American democratic behavior. (85)

Since the preparation of citizens preoccupied both Kant and Rousseau, their perceptions are relevant to the concerns of the liberal agitators. With reference to the education of citizens, Kant contended in *Idea of a Universal History in the Interest of World Citizenship* that:

> so long as . . . states use power for vain and violent extension and thus constantly obstruct the slow efforts of their citizens towards inner development . . . we can expect nothing of this sort, because such a development demands a lengthy inner reworking of every commonwealth to foster the education of its citizens. But all good not based on moral good intention is nothing but vain illusion and splendid misery. (Cassirer 23-4)

According to Cassirer, Kant asserts that Rousseau's purpose in his thoughts on the education of citizens was not to invite man "to go back to the state of nature, but rather to look back to it in order to become aware of the errors and weaknesses of conventional society" (25). It had never been Rousseau's intention to "reverse the direction he had once taken" but to stress the importance of the "will that inspires the [social] contract," since:

> so long as that will is bound to the service of individuals or groups that have gained special privilege through power or wealth, it is the source of all the evil, the champion of all the suffering and injustice that men can inflict on one another." (26)

This was very different from the embryonic political form in late eighteenth century revolutionary France. Ambitious individuals and groups who succeeded in using "power for "vain and violent extension" of their control did not foster the "lengthy inner reworking" necessary to "foster the education of its citizens." Although liberal sympathizers like Condorcet realized the need for, and planned for a national system of education, the ideal of democracy as held by the enlightened Girondins was doomed by the impossibility not only of majority citizen education, but also of an ethical free will implied by Rousseau.

But the Girondins were "enlightened and idealistic" supporting *laissez-faire* economic policies, and interested in improving the condition of blacks and women. Scott observes that abolitionist clubs such as the *Amis des Noirs* and the feminist groups such as the *Cercle Social* [124]were dominated by Brissot and his friends. Moreover, they were also "very interested in preserving the Civil Constitution of the Clergy even when it became clear that this religious compromise no longer served the national interest " (Scott 435-6).

From what has been provided as evidence of Williams's concerns and beliefs in the previous chapters, I have concluded that she would have felt most comfortable with Girondin principles, aspirations and organizations. She would have found their respect for women preferable to the rejection of feminist political involvement in Britain--typified by Laetitia Matilda Hawkins's *Letters* addressed specifically to Williams, and by comments by such traditionalists as Horace Walpole[125]. She contrasts their hopes of a new democratic order with the "monster" of the new despotic order. How clearly and evocatively does she convey the atmosphere that descended around her as the recollection of previous joys turn "melancholic" and "spread a funeral veil over nature [and rumours abound] like hollow noises that roll in the dark gulf of the volcano, and portend eruptions" (1796 I: 4-5). As noted earlier in this chapter, she associated the order evident in Nature and the reflection of it in a more ordered "natural" liberty in society as evidence of the sublime, of a divine design. So entrenched was her acceptance of the eternality of this concept, that it was doubtless a major factor in her ability to withstand the horrors of the Terror during 1793 and 1794, and to emerge with renewed optimism.

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[124] This group began among Parisian intellectuals and municipal leaders in 1790/ "the purpose of the club was to reinterpret Enlightenment thought in the wake of the Revolution" (*Historical Dictionary* 166). It developed "radical notions concerning the rights of women" (167).

Williams's denigration of Marat and Robespierre is indicative of her tendency to focus blame in a situation in which she was also pleading the cause of individual liberty. and citizenship responsibility. After the assassination of Marat, the "loathsome reptile," (127) by Charlotte Corday, whom she equates with the sublime, Williams cites his death as a basis for the accusation and death of the twenty-two deputies of the Gironde. In a reverie she provides as a commentary on the loss of their principles observing:

> It was impossible to contemplate without indignation and despair that glorious revolution, which had opened to mankind the brightest prospect of happiness, and which had promised the most beneficial effects to the world, become the sport of the cruel and the prey of the rapacious. (137)

Reflecting on Paris as it appeared after her release from prison in December 1793, Williams provides her reader with the sense of horror she felt at the results of

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[125] Noted in Chapter IV of this study.

the "sport." A thousand "sensations overwhelmed her spirit" (177), and before her "troubled imagination" rose "spectres of her murdered friends." The square of revolution appeared "clotted with blood," causing her to allude to Defoe's description of the red stains on houses in his *History of the Plague Years* (178). However, "no longer condemned to despair," her rhapsodic mood of 1791 slowly revives. She presents her readers with a sharp contrast to the horror by conveying her sense of again living in "the regions of romance" as several of her formerly proscribed friends return to society (178).

In letter VII of her final volume of *Letters* of events to 1795, Williams traces the downfall and execution of Robespierre, and the establishment of a new constitution. Despite her personal suffering, and the terror and death that anarchy had brought, Williams impresses on her readers her joyful mood at the acceptance of the new legislature of two distinct houses, the Council of 500 and the Council of Elders. Her delight in the return of order is evident as she assesses the new system and concludes:

> The void left by the kingdom of France which . . . was struck out of the chart of Europe, though every power during this interval of annihilation has feelingly experienced the effects of its invisible hand, is now filled up by a powerful and triumphant republic. (1796 IV: 175)

In a buoyant mood she returns her reader to an issue she had addressed in 1790-91 cautioning that others should "beware of accusing the French people of those crimes of which they are the mourners and which they have only been the victims" (175). Listing the suffering of the French during the intervening years, she provides a reminder of the suffering inflicted by the Slave Trade which still "stains the British name" (177). She reminds the reader of the "detestation she had related about the evils of tyranny which assumed the name of revolutionary government," but suggests that there are "horrors beyond the . . . guillotines of Robespierre" among victims of slavery. Once liberty returned and a new constitution is in place, Williams is anxious that people acknowledge that the reign of Terror had been a temporary aberration in the progress towards a more democratic system of government.

In her conclusion to the *Letters* her "flights of rhetoric" turn to classical allusion as she asserts that "the cause of liberty is no less sacred and her charms no less divine [because her votaries] like Midas . . . have been deaf to her sweet sounds" (178). Her old optimism resounds in her concluding paragraph to Letter VII. She observes that "the new constitution, like the spear of Romulus thrown with a strong hand will fix itself in the earth so that no human force can root it out," and "it becomes the object of the people's veneration" (179).

By using excerpts from her letters to indicate the aesthetic terms in which Williams traces the varied course of "liberty" through the years 1792 to 1795, I have attempted to prove that although she was disconcerted and traumatized by the events she experienced, Williams retained her sensibility, and remained an apologist for a more liberal civil society. On occasion, she excused the excesses by placing the problems of legislative change in the broader historical context intent on reminding her reader that the ideal of greater liberality in government would become an increasing reality. In a variety of ways she suggests that "enlightened liberty" will always revive despite periods of despotism, and always to a more radiant dawning (1796 II: 24).

Humanity Under Stress and "injured virtue"

Williams identifies both the virtue and vice of strong feelings in her sketch of the French as:

> a people of quick sensibility. They seem in some sort the creature of passion. Ungovernable in their resentment, cruel and ferocious in their revenge, they yield no less facility to the impulse of mercy and the sympathy of compassion. Even in the extreme they are capable of the most sublime and the most atrocious actions, and inspire alternate love and detestation. (*Letters* 1796 IV: 35)

Throughout the *Letters*, despite her general assessment of the French character, Williams ascribes virtue, compassion, sensibility, altruism and sense to those whose social and political ideals she shared. Several with such traits provide examples of sensibility's "virtue under stress" as they respond to the varied stages of the revolution. Similarly, being empathetic, compassionate and altruistic as her own sensibility dictated, Williams also portrays those she characterized as the "villains," the misguided, and the "unenlightened" as they react in the stress which magnifies their less humanitarian, less sensitive traits.

Throughout her *Letters* Williams records her impressions of men and women who like Wollstonecraft were "physically strong, independently-minded, yet inspired by the positive warmth of sensibility" (Barker-Benfield 361) and endowed them with an altruism that considered the broader context of the historical events in which they participated. She also noted evidence of characteristics of sensibility when they occurred in less favorable characters, or on occasions made excuses for its lack. Three examples of the latter that indicate her belief in the importance of education and environment in determining character occur in her observations about Louis XVI and a member of the revolutionary committee.

After noting that Louis's behavior at his trial was calm, dignified, and proved that he did not have the "imbecility of mind" imputed to him, she claims that kings deserve more compassion than other men.[126] Ascribing to Louis the belief that "slavery (was) the natural inheritance of his subjects," she asserts that to him "the rights of man were but another word for treason" (1796 IV: 5). She blames the "artificial condition" in which princes are placed (6) for distancing them from the "dearest enjoyments of life," and also "in general exempt[ing] them from its celebration" (6).

Recording her impressions of characters at the other end of the social scale, Williams chooses to indicate the unexpected experience of compassion and empathy from certain "commissaries of the revolutionary government" (I: 11), and from Benoit, the keeper of the Luxembourg prison (13). Observing that "the greater part of mankind in all ages, even when accustomed to the most elevated rank have abused power," she wonders how compassion could be hoped for in men who are for the most part "ignorant and unenlightened" (12), yet had been suddenly been provided with responsibility, and with temptations that were difficult to resist. Benoit is singled out as civil, compassionate and gentle (13-14) when "brutality was the order of the day"

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[126] Williams asserts that "educated as they are, they usually are in delusion and error" (1796 IV: 5).

(30). She reminds her readers that this was even more commendable considering that in conditions of anarchy it "required the most daring courage to be humane" (13).

Her sympathy for Danton, a member of the Mountain, emerges when she learns of his delight in nature. Subsequently, she denounces his public execution and that of others since "there is something insulting to humanity in the crowds which are allowed to follow and at times insult the condemned in their last moments."[127] Elsewhere she characterizes the members of the Mountain and Robespierre as generally "aloof from all ordinary feelings of our nature," and sarcastically observes that they are "impervious to the weakness of humanity" (IV: 93).

From her prison experiences, Williams noted the varying character traits and attitudes of those confined. She was particularly impressed by the way many people of various ranks organized themselves in a more democratic manner than that to which they had been accustomed. (1796 I: 20-21). In a detailed account of her experiences of prison life at Chantilly from 20th October 1793 to 19th October 1794, the aristocratic Duchesse de Duras (*née* Noailles) records that the prison "colony was composed of very incongruous material." It included " priests, nobles, soldiers, merchants, and a large number of 'sans-culottes' from all parts of the country . . . who were excellent people" (*Prison Journals* 1801: 31). However, her imprisonment was longer than that of Williams and she was an aristocrat. Soon after her arrival, she found that "loss of liberty unites neither minds nor hearts, and that people are the same in prison as in the world at large – jealous, intriguing, false" (33). She does not speculate as Williams does on possible reasons for different character traits, and provides a more factual account unaccompanied by literary allusions or thoughts about the direction of the political system. However, she acknowledges that the Revolution had caused her to understand poverty by experiencing it (136).

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[127] Letter to Ruth Barlow, April 1794 that I obtained as a photocopy from the University of Berkeley Library, California. It is also cited in Kurtz's *Four New Letters*.

In the character sketches of her friends, Williams stresses their love of liberty, their interest in literature, and their sensibility. Yet she reflects that historians "more impartial than her will accuse these "virtuous friends of liberty of negligence" in neglecting to sufficiently inform the " public mind and directing its will" (1796 I: 66). She describes Marie-Jeanne Roland as "highly cultivated in the study of literature," with a feeling heart, ardently attached to liberty, and with the "most enlarged sentiments of philanthropy" (196). Her inclusion of Roland's impassioned defense of liberty at her trial allowed her to reinforce her general praise for those who were "martyrs" to liberal republican politics. Roland pleads for the enlightenment of France "for whose liberty" she "breathes [her] warmest vows," at a time when the "obligation of rendering justice to injured virtue is beset by danger" (290). Williams characterized Rabaut St. Etienne as "one of the most enlightened, virtuous men, whom the revolution called forth." The deputies and Roland died calmly, firm in their convictions. Charlotte Corday, responsible for the death of Marat appeared at her trial her face sometimes "beaming with sublimity" (134). In her assessment of those whom she considered virtuous, those who attempted to bring a new system of "liberty," and those who "injured virtue" by taking advantage of the liberty they had gained to aggrandize themselves, Williams attempted to remind her readers of the complexity of humanity, and the environmental and hereditary factors which determined their responses.

A Consideration of Transcendence

Another aspect of Williams's reveries and reflections that characterizes her discourse is her attempt to provide a constant reminder that both Nature and ideals transcend time and place, and affect emotional states. Her consistent "flights of rhetoric" and reveries on the subject of liberty indicated in an earlier section of this chapter, create awareness that she believed that the liberalism, and the more progressive state of civil society it nourished, would transcend the historical moment of her experience and inevitably evolve into a more liberal approach to legislation in subsequent centuries. Such a belief enabled her to preserve optimism through the years of anarchy, and the consistency of her "voice."

Williams found strength in her spiritual acknowledgement of a "universal parent" who, she believed, had invested humanity with the ability to progress to a more perfect state. On several occasions in her *Letters*, Williams describes her rapturous "transport" whether while experiencing the "virtue" of humanity evident in displays of compassion, empathy, and affection in responses she witnessed to the anniversary of the Federation in 1790, or in the reveries initiated by contemplation of Nature in which she found "a rejuvenation of existence" (1796: 39), or an awareness of God. While in

Switzerland, after her imprisonment, she responded tearfully in a moment when her mind lost "all traces of the past or thought of the future" as the sublime view of the falls at Tessino reminded her of a tapestry hanging in her Luxembourg prison. She relates the beauties of nature to the "benignity of God" (37). Whilst walking in Montmorenci with one of the Gironde deputies, Fonfrede, the day before his arrest, she also experienced such a moment of transcendence when the "charms of nature soothed (their) imagination" (165). Everything around "breathed delight, and the landscape was a hymn to the Almighty" (165). On her first morning in prison, the beauties of nature visible from the window had produced in her a feeling of "enthusiastic pleasure which swells into devotion" (19) reminding her of the temporary nature of problems.

As noted earlier, Martin Bidney observes in *Patterns of Epiphany* (1997), that poets and fiction writers have "tried to locate such vivid instances - impulsions of dreamlike power, that brief as they are may be, resonate with a riddling intensity" called by Wordsworth "spots in time," and by James Joyce "epiphanies" (1). Bidney describes such times, which Williams implies, as "moments of imaginative or poetic intensity, comparable in imaginative power to traditional theophanies, or appearance of the divine" (1). A continuation of her awareness of such "spots in time" occurs in her next enterprise undertaken against the background of the sublimity of the Swiss scenery. After completing her accounts and reflections on the 1790 to 1795 stages of the French change in government, Williams compiled a two-volume set of observations on Switzerland. Not only did she provide her readers with a "tour" of that country in the manner of William Coxe, whose travelogue she had evidently read and quotes from, but she was intent on conveying an impression of the "state of government" in the Swiss cantons. She was particularly interested in evidence of libertarian principles and their varied application compared to the "state of liberty" in France. In her description of the Swiss scenery, Williams continues to provide expression of "imaginative intensity" and sensibility as she had throughout her *Letters*.

The following chapter analyses Williams's impression of Switzerland and her responses to the government of Napoleon. During these years, her continued attempts to publish were to be met by counter-revolutionary disparagement of her writing. Also according to William Shepherd on a return visit to France in 1814, "the press had been so decidedly enslaved by the tyranny of Bonaparte, that little could be ascertained of the French Nation" (125). Such conditions limited her production of original material and affected the previous interest her work had occasioned in Britain when they were regularly published in the 1790s. However, after her more successful *Letters*, she was still able to find publishers for her political commentaries, and her translations. She continued as an apologist for liberty, tracing and reflecting on the progress of libertarian principles that had so inspired her discourse in the previous five years.

CHAPTER VII

Challenging Liberty and Sublimity

1796-1815

> The first view of Switzerland awakened my enthusiasm . . . "At length," thought I, "I am going to repose my wearied spirit on those sublime objects . . . I shall no longer see liberty profaned and violated; here she smiles upon the hills." . . . (A) residence of several weeks at Basil chilled my enthusiasm (and) I discerned neither the love of arts, of literature, of liberty or of any earthly good, but money.[128]
>
> Helen Williams (*A Tour* 1798)

> I admired Bonaparte . . . To my youthful imagination liberty seemed to rise on the vine covered hills of France . . . I dreamt of the peasants oppressed no longer--of equal rights, equal laws, a golden age . . . But how soon did these beautiful illusions set in blood!
> Bonaparte is fallen . . . [Let] us hope that the political convulsions which have devastated Europe will be succeeded by the blessings of tranquility (and) the ever sacred name of liberty will be the order of the day in the nineteenth century.
>
> Helen Williams (A *Narrative* 1815)

Between her stay in Switzerland during 1794 and the final exile of Bonaparte in 1815, Williams experienced disillusionment in relation to her hope of finding evidence of greater civil liberty in the Swiss Cantons, and her expectations of "liberty" about to "flourish fair under (Bonaparte's) auspices" (A *Narrative* 7). She, like the nation of France, "wearied of the great experiment it had made in politics and for which it had paid so dear" (7). In 1798 she published her Swiss travels in which she reflected on the type of governments that actually existed there as opposed to those she had imagined, or assumed from her reading. In 1801 followed *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions in France* detailing the early years of Bonaparte's government. Then she fell silent as a publisher of political commentary when the "iron hand of despotism " weighed "on her soul" and "subdued all intellectual energy" (3). Once she had decided that Napoleon was ambitious for himself rather than the nation's benefit, she lacked the courage to comment[129] until he was gone. When he was consigned to his final exile on St. Helena, she wrote *A Narrative of Events* in 1815 detailing his abortive coup and the restoration of Louis XVIII. Despite her lengthy silence between 1801 and 1815, she remained a radical commentator.

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[128] Reflecting on William Coxe's earlier travelogue on Switzerland, Williams comments: "Whatever were the Halcyon days of taste and learning at the period of Mr Cox's visit, it is a melancholy fact that the literary spirit (in Basel) had "entirely evaporated since his departure" (115). She asserts that popular reading was "business ledgers" (116).

At this stage in the early nineteenth century, the content and style of her writing differed from the more acceptable publications of writers like Francis Hare Naylor and Joseph Planta. They produced detailed "scholarly" histories of Switzerland that reflected the more familiar and conservative conception of events in European politics that in some ways were antithetical to Williams's principles and "journalistic" style. The following glimpse of their opinions and style reflect an attitude that was more prevalent than that of Williams in the Counter-Revolutionary years of French and British hostilities after 1800.

In a three-volume account of the history of the Helvetic Confederacy, Joseph

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[129] Suspected of being a royalist supporter after her part in the publication of the *Political and Confidential Correspondence of Louis XVI* (1803), she was under surveillance, and turned to translating the travels of Alexander de Humboldt and Bonpland in America (1814).

Planta, principal librarian of the British Museum in the early nineteenth century, detailed Swiss history from the twelfth century. Critical of the French Revolution, he observed:

> No event in history will perhaps ever afford so much matter for speculation . . . as the tremendous revolution, which has of late been spreading horror and devastation over the fairest part of Europe. While a few attentive observers have [traced] the whole evil up to a few miscreants, . . . others have derived the calamity from the rapid influence of wealth . . .. [This raised] the lower orders] by the improved cultivation of the mind . . . [and] caused them to overate the powers of reason and unfitted them for the subordination without which no government can possibly subsist. Many also have not scrupled to decide that a thorough change in the polity of Europe had become unavoidable through the many glaring defects in most of the existing governments. (1799 III: 278-9)

Also commenting on the French Revolution, Hare Naylor, author of three volumes on the history of the Helvetic Republic dedicated to George IV, asserted:

> [The French Revolution] is the most awful event that has ever been accomplished. . . . To investigate a subject so complicated in it's means and so comprehensive in it's results belongs to a future historian . . . [If it is] his painful duty to write of more despotism may providence in mercy deaden his feelings. But if the fall of tyranny be his theme, may he possess sensibility and genius to do it ample justice and taste the pure delights, excited . . . by the spectacle of returning justice, and the virtuous triumphs of insulted freedom. (1809: 90-92)

In the course of her commentaries on the French Revolution, Williams displayed "sensibility," and tasted "delight" when "justice" seemed to return during the various stages of the revolution after 1790. She continued to do so during Napoleon's rise to power in 1798-9 when Planta recorded his assessment of the "thorough changes in the polity of Europe" since 1789. Unlike Hare Naylor and

Planta, Williams presented the theme of "freedom," of increased civil liberty, as an inevitable progression following the gradual erosion of feudal government structures, especially since the revolution in Britain in 1688, as indicated in Chapter VI of this study.

Hare Naylor left predictions of the results of the revolution to a "future historian." Planta speculated about the causes concluding that "future annalists will probably deduce [the problems to be a result of] . . . an inevitable relaxation in the ties of reverence and loyalty which ought at all times to bind people to their sovereigns" (281). Meanwhile, Williams catalogued and applauded each resurgence indicative of progress in liberal-democratic rhetoric.

In this chapter, in which I survey Williams's discourse from 1798 to 1815, I contend that accompanying her expression of radical liberal politics is evidence of continued "sensibility" to the "delights" in the contemporary and future possibilities of evolving civil liberty, and a style adequate to conveying it.

Assessing Swiss Liberty and Sublimity

At the same time as Planta was writing his history of the Helvetic Confederacy, Williams published her assessment of Switzerland based on her experiences while traveling through most of the cantons in her "exile" from France during the Reign of Terror[130]. Her interest in the politics of Switzerland, (especially the progress of "liberty" and the effect of the French revolution on it) and her immersion on occasions in the sublimity of the scenery are two of the major themes of her recorded impressions.

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[130] On the 26 April 1794, Williams obtained a passport (Woodward 116).

In the introduction to her Swiss travels, Williams indicated her disappointment that the people of Basel seemed more concerned about the challenge of acquiring money than the concept of liberty, or the development of the arts and sciences. She concludes that "avarice as well as superstition" had caused people in the smaller cantons to be unsupportive of the French Revolution (215). Acknowledging that it could scarcely be expected that the "aristocratical" cantons would feel any "sympathy for the establishment of French equality," (215) she had anticipated "more congenial sentiments" would be forthcoming from those governments that conveyed at least a "tacit approbation" of the "sovereignty of the people" (215). However, she discovered that during the pre-revolutionary monarchy, payments made by France to the rulers of the smaller cantons, "which the great Cantons had indignantly rejected," (215) had maintained their support. A major contention of Williams was that Switzerland was not the country of the "boasted liberty" (214) that people assumed from history familiar to them. Writers of travelogues like William Coxe tended to concentrate on describing the people and scenery, and lacked her greater concern about the political situation. Apart from her reading, her later friendship with the Swiss ambassador and a variety of educated men and women in Switzerland, indicates some of the sources of her understanding of the political situation.

Initial Impressions of the Swiss Sublime

As she left the "smoking clubs of Basil [Basel]," the first stopping point in her travels, Williams asks in her characteristically intimate style that her reader allow her to recall the images most dear to her imagination while "wandering amidst the sublime landscape of Switzerland" (46). As she loses herself in the "grandeur" of Soleure, she reflects on how "delightful [it is] to bid adieu to every day occurrences, occupations, cares, and pleasures, from the contemplation of these scene . . . which form such a contrast to the littleness of ordinary life" (47). The soothing cascades, the clear rills that were "more of beauty than sublimity," filled her heart with emotion, and nature appeared to her as if--using one of her favorite phrases--"lifting up gradually the veil which concealed those mighty objects of overwhelming grandeur, which (her) imagination sprang forward to meet with enthusiastic raptures" (49).

Later she longed to leave Zurich and "wander amidst those regions of mysteries, sublimity and the solitude of nature where her eternal law seems at all seasons to forbid more than the temporary visits of man" (58). She implies also the transitory nature of transcendence, of times when the viewer experiences "a sort of annihilation of the self, with every past impression erased" (61). The "narrow limits of existence seemed too confined for the expanded spirit" and the "musing mind" is called from "all the little cares and vanities to the higher regions, more congenial than this world to feelings they excite" (62). Such was her response as she looked at the falls on the Rhine near Schaffhausen. The degree to which the rhetoric of sensibility, and her belief in conveying as much as possible the feeling of an experience is made more evident when compared to the account of an earlier traveler, William Coxe to whose comments she refers. Looking at the same scene twenty years previously, he wrote: "the environs are picturesque and agreeable, the river beautifully winding through the vale . . . [I] looked down perpendicularly upon the cataract, and saw the river tumbling over the sides of the rock with amazing violence and precipitation" (14). He fails to appeal to the imagination and the sense of transcendence explicit in Williams's style.

At Altdorf in the canton of Uri, Williams's sensibility to the cause of liberty is stirred by thoughts of William Tell's struggles. She asserts that there "must surely be some defect in the heart which feels no enthusiastic glow, while we tread the spots where . . . heroes have trod, who have struggled for the liberties of mankind" (146). Yet, she excuses those not so moved by noting an example of that "everlasting race of doubters who wage war with all those sublime traditions, . . . which it is delight to believe" (146). In her descriptions of the scenes and her responses, "flights of rhetoric" join with "epiphanies" exposing the intensity of her feeling. In Chapters IV, V and VI in my study, I have provided examples of her reactions on previous occasions when she was moved by sudden awareness of the sublime in nature and in the thoughts, feelings and actions of others during her experiences of the revolution in France. Apart from descriptions of the scenery which, as she observes in her introduction, had been reproduced many times by writers of travelogues, Williams wished to create a different kind of text that provided an assessment of the state of

Swiss politics and the effect that the liberalizing of French politics had on its political legislation.

An Assessment of Swiss Politics

In the "Greater Cantons of Uri, Schweitz, and Untervalden together with Zug and Glaurus," she noted that of the 337,000 inhabitants, there were only 20,000 "active citizens." So that the government though ostensibly "democratic," was actually based on a hereditary aristocracy with regard to the "individuals who [made] up a part of the sovereignty [the rulers]" (214). Acknowledging that there were different classes in other cantons, she realized that in Switzerland, the different groups are "equal companions of each others' children" (214). As a result, when they attained adulthood, bitterness arose when they became aware that they were not "destined to share the boasted liberty of their country," (214) since they could not elect representatives. She cites as one of the main reasons for the hostility of the three Great cantons toward the French Revolution, the cessation of payments initiated by the previous French monarchy.

Appraising the situation in the Levantine Valley, Williams became aware that the people of the valley were governed by baliffs from Uri after they had been defeated in an attempt to gain independence. She scathingly notes, after realizing that other cantons had helped to suppress the uprising, that no canton could interfere in the government of another except to "punish the presumption of its subjects" (201) when they opposed their ruler. Rather than attaining any freedom by their revolution, the

Levantine Valley became "unresisting slaves to their citizen sovereigns" and the ruling baliff of Uri.

Observing the lack of democratic systems of representation and legislation in the smaller cantons, she questioned how the "democratic" cantons of Uri, Schweitz and Underwalden governed themselves. After tracing their history from the 1307 liberation of their country from Austria, she asserts that the three cantons had determined that the "supreme power resides essentially with the people" (211). Consequently, each individual over the age of fourteen met once a year to decide upon laws and elect magistrates responsible to the people. However, she notes that the type of representation in the three cantons had been disputed by Stephanie de Genlis. She observes that since de Genlis had played a "distinguished part" in the French Revolution, she may not have had access to sufficient facts. Even Williams and her travelling companions had to hide the nature of their French associations.

Still questioning the degree of democracy in the cantons, Williams concludes that ironically, the people in the "democratic" Cantons were ruled by a power more absolute than that exercised by the privileged classes of the Great Cantons (213). She linked the power of superstition to that of "avarice" as one of the factors limiting Swiss liberty. She asserts that the priests had achieved more than aristocracy, and that "no other part of Switzerland [was] so unenlightened, and consequently less . [available] to the spirit of liberty than the little Cantons" (213). There she observed that "democracy and despotism march[ed] under the same banners" (213). The population represented in the general assembly was actually less than in the "democratic" cantons where 20,000 governed over three hundred thousand.

As a result of her assessments of the different governments and their degree of civil liberty, she advises the Swiss who governed to study their history and recall the "valourous feats" of their ancestors like Verner de Straussake and William Tell, and to "loose the reins of arbitrary power" (216). This seems reminiscent of her allusion to the fact that Britain needed to remember their struggle for liberty in the late seventeenth century, the principle of which had initiated French agitation for government reform (*Letters* II: 1796). Williams makes a distinctive and valid appeal to the people of the countries with which she was most familiar, Britain, France and Switzerland, to recall their liberal heritage, and as citizens to honor it by not allowing despotism of any kind to intrude and hinder progress towards increasingly liberal government legislation.

Character Observations from her Swiss Travels

Despite the serious intent of her study, Williams also enjoyed meeting a variety of people of different nationalities then residing in Switzerland. She had found Basel crowded with *émigrés*, and met others as she traveled. The vignettes she presents illustrate the positive contacts she made. On meeting the daughter of Beccaria, philosopher and renowned advocate of prison reform, she noted that she had inherited from her father an understanding that included "that independence of soul, and love of rational liberty which is the characteristic of superior minds" (227).

Williams also describes how intriguing she found Lavater because the system of physiognomy was "a complete study of every varying expression of the human face divine" (66). However, she thought his analysis of expression "which is the emotion of moral qualities," could "shed an animated glow, as a sort of divinity on the features of deformity." Sensitive to the emotions of others, Williams observed that his smile, when it broke through, often changed his serious appearance showing "an inner sweetness and intelligence." Also, he was eloquent in conversation which seemed to issue from an "effusive" heart. It is noticeable that she chose to describe those people who exhibited sensibility and a feeling heart--both qualities that she had long appreciated. Lavater believed that accompanying a respect for God should be a respect for time which he considered immoral to waste, (69) and his "sensibility was awake to devotional feelings" (70). Concerning the polemics of right and wrong, she noted that he thought rectitude in historical fact less important than right and wrong in religious sentiments and in human action. Characteristically, she appreciated that there was more "feeling than logic in his conclusions" (71). She preferred his "pious sentiments" to the "pride in scepticism" of the French philosophers, (72) especially those "imitators of Rousseau and Voltaire who did not fully understand true philanthropy and genius" (73).

Among her observations on religious sects in Switzerland, Williams describes the theophilanthropists, whom she refers to as "better informed Christians" (83). Among them was Lepaux, who was later slandered as an atheist by the Anti-Jacobin Press along with Godwin, Coleridge and a host of other perceived radicals including herself, in the early nineteenth century (see Chapter VIII). She ascribes to him the belief that the human mind without religious feelings is a void which cannot be filled by the worship of reason. The sect was founded on the belief of the moral government of the world by a Supreme Being, and the immortality of the soul (79). She likens the simplicity of their worship to that of the Dissenters in England, and noted that the group gained the support of educated men. When considering the degree of religious toleration in Switzerland, another criticism that Williams had of Basel was the evident prejudice of its population against Jews. She praises the contrasting French attitude of toleration citing the fact that Jews could hold high office in the state, and drawing attention to the work of Gregoire (105).

Williams's Concluding Impressions of Switzerland

Williams's conclusion after travelling through the cantons is no more favorable to the Swiss character than her introductory remarks. She asserts that "liberty, of which so vain a boast (had) been made, is so little understood" (II: 272). Expressing regret that festivals, by which the spirit of liberty could be effectively "preserved or excited" (128), and which had they been habitual in Switzerland, would probably have been forbidden by the policy of the times. It would be dangerous to have kindled fuel near so mighty a conflagration" [in France] (128).

Williams's belief that those who dwelt among such sublimity would have more comprehension of "liberty" came perhaps not only from her assumption about the scenery and the elevation of mind with which she associated liberal principles, but also from authors she had read prior to her travels. Since she alludes to William Coxe's travelogue published in 1776, she was evidently familiar with his assessment. Coxe observed in July 1776 that he had "great pleasure in breathing the air of liberty." He even asserted that every person there had " apparently the mien of content and satisfaction," (5) which reminded him of his countrymen. However, his political perspective differed from that of Williams; he was not in favor of supporting the political "experiment" of the French. In 1790, fourteen years after his experience of Switzerland, Coxe sent a letter to Richard Price criticizing the sermon that had prompted Burke's *Reflections*. He pointed out that Price was known for "his sentiments in favor of civil liberty." Consequently, Coxe thought he would have focused "with rapturous satisfaction on the blessings which had traced the general progress of literature and reason which followed [the] light of liberty" (6), in the "excellent British constitution" (3)--a constitution so free from the "evils and oppressions of the monarchy" (3).

In her conclusion Williams displays the same disappointment that she felt in the early weeks of her Swiss travels. She reiterates her observation on the "absolute restraint put on the press, and the intolerance exhibited with respect to religious opinions which stifled every attempt to promote a more liberal education, and foster more benevolent and enlarged sentiments" (II: 272). Enchanted by the scenery, she remained critical of the limited degree of advancement in the population's comprehension of civil liberty.

Travelers Influencing Williams's Preconceptions

Apart from her reading of Coxe, Williams was no doubt familiar with Dr. John Moore's account of his Swiss travels since he had been one of her close friends from the early 1780s. He had sent her a poem about his experience of Wales to which she responded in the second volume of her 1790 *Letters*. Moore commented in 1781 in *A View of Society and Manners in France, Germany and Switzerland* that Geneva was in many respects "as happy as the heart of man could desire, or his imagination conceive" (107). He observed that the citizens "enjoy freedom untainted by licentiousness and security unbought by the horrors of war" (107) rendering Geneva " a very desirable retreat for people of a philosophical turn of mind" (108). He also observed that since education was cheap and "liberal," both sexes were "remarkably well instructed" (108),"with mechanics amusing themselves with works of Locke, Montesquieu and Newton." In the library at Bern, he found the works of Milton, Algernon Sydney, Locke and Addison (227), popular with political radicals, and all favorites of Williams. He asserts that "no characters have a more just claim to the admiration and gratitude of posterity as those who have freed their countrymen from the capricious insolence of tyrants" (227), but notes the variation in the republic's forms of government and religion. Moore concludes that "a spirit of independence, and freedom, tempered by sentiments of decency, and the love of order, influence in the most remarkable manner, the minds of this happy republic" (110).

Like Coxe, Moore was writing at a time before the French Revolution and was not attempting any assessment of the progress in civil liberty. This was the concern of

Williams and others as anticipated by those aware and supportive of theories of "liberty and equality" about which Planta was so scathingly critical in 1802 (282). He blamed the "designing men" of the revolution with their cries of " liberty, equality and representation" for upsetting the "harmony, peace and prosperity which had subsisted for ages" in many "sequestered valleys" (283). Planta's comments at least confirm Williams's opinion about the lack of understanding of civil liberty among the majority of Swiss, as she assessed it.

Francois d'Ivernois, who published in English five years before the Revolution, was another positive commentator on Switzerland of whom Williams may have been aware. From a Frenchman's perspective, he characterized the Swiss as imbued with "a veneration for the laws, and all the simplicity of republican manners" (*A History of the Political Views of Geneva:* 1784 viii). He also indicated his belief that "the fruits of their industry [were] grafted on the tree of liberty, deprived of which indigence must be their portion," and energized "from generation to generation to struggle against attacks on their constitution" (vii).

Despite her criticism, Williams observes that although nothing in her opinion could be more defective than legislation in Switzerland, "the practices of these governments [did] not always corresponded with their theory" (277). She maintains that the smallness of the towns, the social connections, and the harmony had "been sufficient to interrupt the progress of the government towards absolute despotism" (273). Hence, there *appeared* "more cultivation, ease and prosperity" than usual in arbitrary governments (274). However, she concludes that this did not provide security to the individual since in a country "where liberty is neither guarded by law, nor by social institution, there may exist a sort of public moderation which spares the great mass, but gives no positive protection" (274). She contended that the "submission of the aristocracy in Swiss government had awakened new ideas." Consequently, "should a spark fall from the blaze of French liberty on [those] combustible materials, it [might] kindle into a flame" by which the French revolution could by "friendly intervention, . . . mold the various governments [of Switzerland] into forms of nearer similitude to its own" (275-6).

Providing some support for Williams's assessment of the degree to which Switzerland might be influenced by France at the end of the eighteenth century, is a survey of that period by an early twentieth scholar, Henry Lloyd. He observed:

> The French Revolution roused once more the dormant spirit alike of nationality and democracy. The invasion of Switzerland by the armies of the French directory, in 1797, found the ruling classes hopelessly at variance, but the majority of the common people alike in the cantons and the subject lands, favourable to the new gospel of liberty and equality. Not equally welcome, however, was the brand new highly centralized Constitution of the Helvetic Republic which Napoleon sought to substitute for the old Confederation. (20)

At this time Williams was favorably disposed to the new regime of Napoleon, believing him to be a man of integrity. Her attitude continued even when he dissolved the national representation and made himself First Consul in 1802 until he "corrected the defect of discernment in those who had thus augured his genius and his virtue" (*Narrative of Events*, 1815: 7-8). However, in 1798, she believed that a "new era was opening to the world" (*A Tour* 55).

To counter the disillusionment she had expressed about the state of liberty in the cantons, when her travels there ended Williams returned her reader to her other preoccupation. She observed that her reluctance as she left was based only on leaving behind the sense of transcendence it accorded her by allowing her "meditation of the glorious scenery, the view of which renders the mind insensible to human evils by lifting it beyond their reach" (277). This aspect of her response to the sublimity of the scenes had caused her to continue her characteristic use of the language of sensibility, and it is this for which at least one of the reviews in the British press criticized her. A reviewer of *A View* in the *Monthly Magazine* observed that while it was "a work of considerable and deserved popularity . . . exciting a double interest because since her publication," the moral and political features had suffered a change by the French invasion, Williams's writing style was too effusive. He noted that her style is "well known; less elegant than if it were less ornamental, she seems to have no relish for simplicity of composition, whose charms are so infinitely more fascinating than the rich poetic periods which almost monopolizes her pages" (1798: 491). An earlier mid-eighteenth century style that attempted to appeal to emotion and made popular by its difference from the austerity of Augustan rhetoric, had by the end of the century declined in its popularity.

After Williams published two more volumes of commentary, her *Sketches of Observations* on the situation in France between 1799 and 1801, the *Monthly Magazine* reminded its readers of its previous remarks on her Swiss commentaries. A reviewer observed that "having before taken the opportunity to observe that this lady's style of composition has few charms for us, it [was] necessary to repeat the remarks"

(Jan. 1801: 565). He asserts that "her writing is too rapturous for the sobriety of our taste . . . nor can we think that foreign words, crowded metaphors, and poetic extasies (sic), are by any means suitable to the gravity and decorum of historic style" (565). However, in July of 1801 came a positive comment that "whether it be to the taste of the reader, however, (whatever may be the reader's politics), he may venture to insure him entertainment in the perusal of these letters" (567).

Williams Initial Acceptance of Napoleon's "Liberty"

On one occasion in her commentaries on Switzerland, Williams became effusive when she contemplated the favorable image she had of Napoleon in 1798. She observed, in the characteristic mode of sensibility, that

> what swells the heart with reverence, is not the hero standing in the breach, it is the benefactor of his race converting the destructive lightening of a conqueror's sword into the benignant rays of freedom and presenting to vanquished nations the emblems of liberty and independence entwined with the olive of peace. (56)

As the new century approached, Williams rapturously welcomed Bonaparte's role in government. She commented confidently, maintaining that the "[g]lory of Bonaparte belongs to the revolution, to his valorous soldiers, to France" for it soars beyond the limits, however enlarged, or expanded; he belongs not to France, or to the revolution, like Homer and Newton, Bonaparte belongs to the world" (*A Tour* 57).

In her reverie, she quotes as if in praise of Bonaparte, mention of "unparalleled acts of pure expansive benevolence" from Ossian, one of her favorite sources, a writer whom she believed at that time Napoleon appreciated for reasons similar to her own (*Narrative* 1815: 6).

A Return to French Politics

During her travels and assessment of politics in Switzerland, Williams was also documenting her observations of life in France up to the new Constitution of 1795. Following the publication of her views on Switzerland were two more volumes of commentary on France, which were published in 1801. The first three letters of *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic* continued the commentary on Swiss politics which she had provided in her *View*. The country had--as the reviewer in the *Monthly Magazine* alluded to above noted--experienced a change after French troops crossed into Switzerland ostensibly to preserve the terms of a 1565 treaty with the Vaud region involving the maintenance of its independence. Throughout the two volumes of *Sketches* Williams traces the course of liberal politics amongst other events and circumstances she experienced between 1799 and 1801. Saddened by the violence that accompanied the French army's occupation of Switzerland, she questions and laments in imagery reminiscent of her previous method of positioning liberty in a pseudo religious context:

> Alas! Can no other offerings be made to liberty than those of human blood? Are we for ever to be deceived in the object of our hope, and by sacrificing to the infernal deities, whilst we imagine we are addressing our vows to the divinities of heaven! Must the trophies of liberty be numbered by nations slain, and countries desolated? Or is our *philosophy false* and neither liberty nor truth made for man? (9)

Disillusioned by events in Switzerland, Williams here raises a similar question to anti-radical political criticism--to which I referred in Chapter V--that the ideas of theorists who envisioned more liberal, democratic forms of government were deluded by "false philosophies." She had hoped from "the prevailing disposition in Switzerland" for evidence of "the broad and generous principles of equality . . . that equality of right which removes every obstacle to the progress of genius, every impediment to the advancement of knowledge which gives the palm of wisdom to the wise" (7). Her juxtaposition of the two thoughts in concurrent letters invites the readers' engagement with the issue and she proceeds--despite disappointment at the direction of Swiss political change--to further justify the pursuit of "liberty" throughout *Sketches*.

However, after experiencing the trauma of anarchy when "liberty" went astray, a change becomes evident in one aspect of Williams's perceptions of the sacrifice needed to implement more liberal governments. Unlike her early 1790s rationalization that deaths were inevitable in attempts to reform government by revolution, she admits to being sickened by "those experiments on human happiness," since the "revolutionary impulse is too swift to admit of a pause at the sight of individual misery" (13). Attempting to appeal to her readers' feelings, she creates the imagery of a "tempest . . . too loud to hear the wailings of the wretch that perishes beneath its billows," for "private sufferings are as a feather in the balance"(14). To deepen the sense of contrast, she reflects sadly on an evening walk over "the romantic hills beyond Basil," and feeling "the general conviction" that Switzerland was "fitted to political change," when no sense of the events she came to deplore " then darkened [their] imaginations" (14).

Recalling the "covenant of plunder, pillage and devastation" that had accompanied the revolution in Switzerland, she again draws the reader to the original rationale for reform. She refers to the thought of "the cause of liberty and independence, those light and airy visions with which we fed our souls." She questions, at this stage "who here thinks of metaphysical subtleties?" (17), and asserts that when avarice " hardens the heart, [and] quickens the malignant sensibilities," the initial ideals are lost (18). She recognized that throughout Europe there existed an historical connection between freedom and Switzerland, "an habitual reverence for the Swiss government fostered by the complaisance of travellers" even though the forms of legislation "were often in contradiction to its essence" (22). Her comment about the "complaisance of travellers" is a criticism of the type of travelogues which provided their readers with descriptions of the scenery of Switzerland and recorded little if anything about the political realities. In the Preface to her *View* she had acknowledged the popularity of numerous commentaries on the Swiss landscape, but focused attention on the fact that she intended to convey her assessment of the political situation in the cantons, especially in regard to the progress of liberty compared to France. Similarly in her *Letters*, (1790-95) her intent was to comment not only on events, characters, and personal experiences, but also on the political struggle to liberalize government.

Having invaded the readers' mind with thoughts and images of death relating to the Swiss revolution, Williams reinforces the sense of devastation caused by war by expressing her grief on the death of the Abbot of Engelburg of whom she had fond memories from her stay in Switzerland. He is especially appropriate for her purpose since he had been pro-revolutionary and "loved mankind too well to condemn an experiment in its favour" (24). As if addressing those who aided revolution, she pleads for more concern for such supporters of change, asking that while "we war against tyranny and tyrants, we (should) receive into communion all whose end and aim is the happiness and freedom of the people" (25). Having experienced the deaths of many close "friends of freedom" like Marie-Jeanne Roland and Jacques-Pierre Brissot in France, Williams continued to support the reforming ideals for which they died, but provided a reminder that leaders should consider their ideals, and acknowledge others who are supportive of them. As if wishing to gain even more reader empathy for her perspective on the wasteful sacrifice of those who wished to benefit humanity, Williams chooses to follow her comments on the Swiss revolution with a letter about grief in her personal life. It provides a touching account of the death of her sister, Cecilia, "the beloved friend of her life (28)." The appropriateness of her reference at this stage is increased by her description of the way in which her sister had "corrected the melancholy habitual" to her own nature (29). She had intended in her plea about the proponents of liberty to stress their beneficial effect; similarly she draws attention to the particular quality that Cecilia had which had been of benefit to her. Also, from a general acknowledgement of "private sufferings" she gradually leads her reader deeper into possible considerations of their own immediate family and the intensity of grief experienced when tragedies erupted there of the type further magnified by civil conflict.

Turning from thoughts of devastation, Williams reflects on the advantages which the revolution had brought to France reminding her reader – in her role as apologist –that France had struggled for its "civil and political existence against the combined powers of Europe . . . and partizans of despotism and anarchy within" (38). As if to restore confidence in increased civil liberty after commenting on the suffering it could entail, she enumerates the benefits which included the abolition of the law of primogeniture (29), the reduction of ancient religious superstition in favor of the gradual development of a "more rational faith" (41), a reduction in the joint despotism of government and clergy, a more equal distribution of property than under feudal customs (43), and the abolition of seigneural rights such as the labour of the corvée, and hunting privileges (53). Concluding that "the peasant now stands erect," a free citizen "finding none superior before the law," she also asserts that the Revolution had improved conditions for peasant women. Citing Arthur Young's observations of their former pitiable state on his travels through France (a source widely read at that time), Williams gives few details from her own observations, but implies that their improvement would accompany that of the men. Since two thirds of the French population were engaged in agriculture, she thought it "needless to enquire any further whether the mass of happiness in France be increased or diminished by the revolution"(58).

Several of her letters in *Sketches* relate to the liberty theme which pervades this 1801 text. She criticizes British action, especially that of Horatio Nelson[131], in the independence struggle in Naples, and also the problems of political corruption. Party coalitions and factional conflict occurred in the French government during Napoleon's absence. Still her confidence that Napoleon could maintain the security of liberal republican politics is evident. On his return, her "heart beats quick with expectation . . . no longer angry with the coalition" in government when she sees "opposed to all its efforts, the broad field of Bonaparte's genius" (317). When Bonaparte dissolved the national representation, she excused his action as a repression of the Jacobin coalition she had criticized in *Sketches* and thought his actions prevented a return to terrorism (*A Narrative*, 1815: 7). When he was named First Consul in 1799, Williams optimistically believed that "liberty was about to flourish . . . and that France would henceforth be great and happy" (7). Almost immediately she returns the reader to the earlier days of Bonaparte's regime, and excuses her former support citing the combination of circumstances that favored his acceptance--particularly a common hope that he could stabilize the country. She relates the fact that the "nation was wearied of the great experiment it had made in politics, and for which it had paid so dear. The cruel abuses of liberty, the horrible outrages of the reign of terror were still present to every memory, and even the republicans themselves despaired of a republic" (7). Further comments come after the final exile of Bonaparte and show Williams to have returned to her youthful acceptance of constitutional monarchy since she faults the French for adding "to its offences a new injustice" of not trusting the Bourbons to forgo reprisals (7).

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[131] There is a copy of her 1801 *Sketches* annotated by Nelson in the British Library.

Acknowledging that she had been a Bonapartist, Williams excuses herself by observing that when Bonaparte "first appeared on the scene, [she] was not yet cured of enthusiasm" (6) for the revolution, and that he had "presented himself to the world as fighting the battle of liberty" (6). However, when by "rapid gradations" (8) he became consul for life and then emperor (1804), embarking on foreign policies of aggrandizement, he reminded her of the ambition of the former Jacobin régime. At this point, she surrounds him with imagery and a quotation that attaches him to the ambitious route of Shakespeare's Macbeth. Feeling an "insuperable repugnance to returning on the past," she apologized in her 1815 text for starting with the "second volume" of Napoleon's history (4), choosing to leave any reflection on his career between 1802 and 1815 to a future historian (4). Only when she had thought he was capable of stabilizing a liberal republican government with increased citizen representation had she remained loyal to his initially projected intent.

Napoleon's Challenge to Williams's "Liberty"

Williams's enthusiasm for Napoleon gradually declined as she noted the directions into which his personal ambitions led him. She considered his ambition to be insatiable and "*était pour lui comme un lit de torture, où son mauvais génie le tenait attaché*" [was for him like a bed of torture, to which his evil genius held him bound] (*Souvenirs* 1827: 158). She also considered him incapable of knowing " *le* *charme d'une société spirituelle et polie,*" [the charm of a refined, intellectual/ spiritual society] which to her was "*un des plus grands plaisirs de l'existence*" [one of the greatest pleasures of life] (158), creating "*un cœur libre de soucis*" [a heart free from anxiety] (158). After the 18th Fructidor coup expelling such moderates as Carnot, a friend of Williams, "*lois arbitraires régnaient; l'égalitié républicain était procrite*" [arbitrary laws prevailed; republican egality was proscribed] (116). Only the brilliant victories of Bonaparte's conquests "*donnait . . . quelque lustre a la république*" [gave some luster to the republic] (117).

Evidence of such a negative perspective, helps to explain why Williams wrote no political commentaries between 1801 and 1815. Visiting her in 1814, Henry Crabb Robinson observed that she had retained her "original love of liberty," and detesting Bonaparte, was unwilling to write commentaries in his favour. Her refusal to do so made her a target of surveillance, and she would have been persecuted if she and Stone had not had friends among members of the police (Robinson 1814). During these years Williams turned her attention to the rearing of her two nephews, salon activity and translation work. Remaining silent in print, Williams was intensely involved in social gatherings in which politics were discussed. Woodward observes, and evidence presented later in this chapter confirms this, that her salon

> *était un des plus importants qu'il eùt sous le Consulat. Sa société était composée de peintres, de philosophes, de poêtes, enfin de tous les gens les plus distingués soit dans les arts, soit dans la politique.* [was one of the most important ones during the Consulat, composed of painters, philosophers, poets, [and] eventually all the most distinguished men in arts and politics] (169)

It is necessary to note that at the time when her reputation as a writer of political commentary was in decline and denigrated in her native country, her home was frequented by such influential figures in French society as Boufflers, Esmenard, Bitaubé, Pougens, Chenier, J-B. Say, Ginguene, Bernadin de St. Pierre, Kosciusko, (the latter two long-time friends) and Alexander de Humboldt. It was Humboldt's four-volume work of travels and research that occupied some of her writing hours during these years and which provides a further indication of her knowledge of such areas as geography, history, botany, anthropology, and astronomy. Also, during this time when she chose to publish no original works, she was engaged in a less well-received three-volume translation of Louis XVI's *Political and Confidential Correspondence* to his brothers published in 1803. The original was later suspected to have been a fraud. (They are now listed in the British Library Catalogue as "spurious" letters composed by S. Lambert, Count de la Platiere and F. Babie de Berceray.)

Late in 1815 when Napoleon was consigned to his final exile on St. Helena, Williams returned to the publication of political commentary with a *Narrative on the Events* which had occurred between the landing of Napoleon in March 1815 to the Restoration of Louis XVIII in October. She enters the phase of her vituperation of Napoleon which continued to her final work, *Souvenirs*, in 1827. Likening him to a "tyrant hastening to fill a vacant throne," (*Narrative*, 34) she acknowledged the fear that with Napoleon's attempted *coup*, "peace, commerce, security, fortune, children,--all that binds the human heart to existence, all that cheers and gives value, was again to be sacrificed at the shrine of the usurper" (35).

Again her writing addressed the broader issues affecting both the public and personal domain. She continued her commentaries in her characteristic style, presenting not only the facts as she knew them but also investing them with a style which had previously caused British reviewers to criticize her for overindulging in an expression of her feelings.

Williams perceived that not only other European states, but also Napoleon's armies were endangering the liberty of France. A concern about the devastation caused by war had been a theme of Williams's writing from her first published work of *Edwin and Eltruda* in 1782. It surfaces again as she reflects, in her role as mother to her nephews "who were to [her] as children" (*Narrative* 46), the fear that conscription invoked in other mothers. She also cites the criticism of Napoleon by young women who portrayed him as responsible for the deaths of so many of their lovers and husbands through the expansionist military concentration during his rule (45).

To further illustrate Napoleon's attempts to continue dictatorial government on his return in 1815, Williams cites his presentation of an "Additional Act to the Constitution," composed in exile, as a *fait accomplis* when he requested a vote by representatives at the Field of May in April (77). She concluded that

> even had "this string of articles resounded with national sovereignty, equality, and rights of man, and had the act conferred every kind of liberty, and made all republican concessions, - the mode of its promulgation would too clearly have implied it was merely an imperial mandate which . . . could serve only as an instrument to sanction all his past and future tricks of despotism. (79)

However, later in her *Narrative*, Williams returns to her characteristic optimism when there appeared a possibility for a resurgence of progress in terms of liberal politics. Once the political situation seemed to return to the old course of evolution towards increased civil liberty, her enthusiasm rebounded. Her resilience in regard to her faith in liberal politics needs explanation since she was thought during her day, and by some who have assessed her since as disloyal, inconsistent, or too partisan in her attitude towards different political groups. The fact that she was fifty-four at this time, and had over thirty years of involvement in radical political commentary and social interaction behind her, a course that had caused intellectual, and emotional grief, reconfirms my view that Williams's discourse on liberty was to her a form of creed. Supporting this is her admission in *Souvenirs* that "liberty" had been "*son culte et son idole*" [her cult/creed and idol] (1827: 3). Her tendency to give way to rhapsodic praise and reveries concerning "liberty" and to associate it with such images of shrines, altars and worship also reinforces this perception. Such an attitude of mind also explains her tendency to search out and support whoever shared her "faith" in "liberty."

Despite her dislike of Bonaparte, Williams's tolerance, once he was again exiled and danger seemed to have passed, is apparent. In an effusive style, which at times barely contains the joy she was still capable of feeling when she noted renewed hope for her ideal, she suggests that had Bonaparte voluntarily abdicated power after the moving spectacle introducing the Additional to the Act[132], a joy reminiscent of that she experienced at the first anniversary of the Revolution in 1790--it would have proved a "proud day of new and virtuous renown" (113). Allowing herself another reverie, she reflected that amidst all the horrors of his devastating ambition, this "last scene of his public existence would have shone like a track of unsullied light along a dark and stormy horizon" (113). Applying religious terms, it is as if she wished to see him as a sinner saved as he voluntarily gives up his grasp on the liberty he had violated.

After her delight in the moment, Williams returns her readers to her concern that "all the noble powers of liberty had been profaned" (144) as the allied armies drew near Paris. The immediacy of the letterform allows a record of her changing moods. As Louis XVIII is reinstated, she asserts that every "enlightened Frenchman, every liberal mind, every true lover of his country, wept tears of blood at its cruel, its reiterated humiliation" (171). Not having been directly responsible for "having conquered Europe, . . . they were (nevertheless) doomed to share the punishment and to deplore its unbearable disgrace" (171). Her sadness on this occasion balances the record of her joy in the nation's seeming accomplishment in 1790. With confidence in the citizenry, but implying their previously "uneducated" political status in liberal thought, she contends that the French had needed a "tremendous lesson," that:

> [They] were too proud of their A B C liberty: they feel now the alphabet of only the rudiment of science. They have learnt the table of contents of liberal principles, and they will at last comprehend the whole volume. (206)

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[132] The Field of May in 1815 when Napoleon again attempted to introduce his preferred legislation without proper voting on the day arranged to ratify the addition.

In the conclusion to her *Narrative*, however, she is skeptical about the results of the Congress of Vienna, which was intended to unite the "wills" of Britain, Germany, Russia and Austria in a European peace. She comments that:

> This union of the four great powers gives them an immense physical force. Hence the idea of forming the High Police of Europe, --that is, of governing the world according to the interests of these four cabinets. It has been observed that, of all the consequences of the French Revolution, this was the most fatal to the liberty of mankind. (254)

The proposed European congress at Vienna she terms a "flattering dream"(254), believing that "should a real European Areopagus exist, it will be essential that constitutions should be framed for all the states of which Europe is composed" (254). Nevertheless, she returns to optimism generated by her conviction in the evolution of liberal principles. Excessively supportive of French success, she predicts an "abhorrence of any further expansionist policies, and a resurgence of prosperity in arts, science and industry (254). Still an apologist for liberty, she concludes:

> Upon the whole let us hope that the political convulsions which have devastated Europe will be succeeded by the blessings of tranquility; and that moderation, magnanimity, and above all, the long profaned but ever-sacred name of liberty will become the order of the day in the nineteenth century. (254-5)

Conclusion

Although now in her mid-fifties, Williams continued her political involvement by publishing commentaries. She had also continued to attend and host salons, and was visited by many British visitors who flocked to France after Napoleon's exile and the Restoration the Bourbon monarchy in 1814. In Chapter VIII, I focus on her final commentaries, and on evidence from people's observations of Williams during her final years.

CHAPTER VIII

Liberty: An Attribute of Humanity?[133]

1816-1821

> [E]very human being may aspire to the dignity of being free. Liberty is, like the moral sense, an attribute of the race.
>
> Helen Maria Williams *Letters on Events* 1819

> I had lent him Miss Williams's *Present State of France*. He said to me while dressing, "That is a vile production of that countrywoman of yours. It is a heap of falsehoods. This," opening his shirt and showing his flannel waistcoat, "is the only coat of mail I ever wore. My hat lined with steel too! There is the one I wore," pointing to the one he always carried.
>
> Napoleon to General O'Meara while on St. Helena [134]

Williams asserted that "liberty" was an intrinsic characteristic of humanity as David Hume[135] contended with regard to the "moral sense." The influence of her education had created in Williams a predisposition to the theories of philosophers like Hume, and to the "natural rights" theories involving civil libertarian principles supported by her mentors in Rational Dissent. Among ideas and beliefs that she had absorbed, her subscription to the importance of a sense of "liberty" as an attribute of humanity, provides another explanation for her unshakable belief in the ultimate success of liberal theory in politics. She perceived enlightened liberty to be the source of "whatever is great and noble in our nature" (*Events* 1819 183).

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[133] Cited from *Letters on the Events which have passed in France since the Restoration in* 1815. (London, 1819) 183. She continues this thought by asserting that "wherever man exists (liberty) ought to be found; and he who is unworthy to possess that blessing has abdicated his rank in the creation" (183).

[134] *Napoleon at St. Helena.*II 31 London, 1888 (Cited by Woodward 257).

[135] Michael Meehan observes that for David Hume, liberty in its "simplest forms was one of the silliest of John Bull's illusions" (3).

In 1821, within six years of her death, Williams had the satisfaction of observing her friend, Benjamin Constant[136], as leader of the opposition Liberal party in the French parliament. With confidence and persistence, she had expressed renewed hope after the disillusioning experiences of the anarchical "despotism" of 1793-4, the despotism of a different type imposed by Napoleon, and the attempts of the *Ultras* to return France to the pre-Revolutionary system. She was eventually to be rewarded with the indication that a liberal party in government would indeed pass on a new political component to government in the nineteenth century. Her "dream" of the 1790s proved to be no "illusion." However, to make it more of a reality, the education of a larger representative section of the population toward an increased understanding of their responsibility for a more liberal legislation was necessary. It was a process that took thirty years to reach fruition. As Williams realized, it had simply been a matter of time, and traumatic change *had been necessary* to attain the 1820s stage in the evolution of liberal theory and practice.

In her 1821 *Letters* Williams was able to reflect on the degree of interest in politics that had developed among the French population. It was an interest not only of the heart, but also of the intellect. No longer were discussions of reform and the monitoring of political decisions confined to the salons. The "abstract theory" which had scarcely penetrated the masses in the 1790s, was now less of a mystery to a much larger proportion of citizens, and she joyfully observed the difference. Reflecting on the changes that had occurred since the beginning of the French revolution in 1789, Williams concluded that young people had become more educated and "cherished liberty" (*Letters* 182: 8). They had experienced a "new order of things," were "better taught" (9), and had not been taught "to respect the old" (8). They bore no resemblance to the "insensate multitude who, in the first year of the revolution, had just thrown off their chains and profaned in their ignorance the cause they revered" (9).

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[136] Constant was one of the several lovers of another woman intellectual and advocate of Liberty, Germaine de Staël. Quoted by Woodward is "*si Londres peut se glorifier de ses Burney, Radcliffe, Roche, Williams etc., Paris peut citer aussi ses Dubocage, de Staël, Pipelet et quelques autres* [if London may glory in Burney, Radcliffe, Roche, Williams etc. . . . Paris may also cite Dubocage, de Staël, Pipelet and several others] (221).

As proof of a more general involvement in politics, Williams cites the interest in political literature and debate. "Such was the present avidity for political information," (108) that the reading rooms of Paris were often crowded from morning to evening with "old and young, all alike eager to seize upon some new pamphlet" and to "obtain information of what [was] passing" (108). At the Athenée, "a long established literary institution,"(108) crowds of both sexes discussed political questions. At such gatherings, nothing attracted "so brilliant a crowd" as the "discussion of some political question (105)" posed by Benjamin Constant, [137] the leader of the liberal opposition in the Chamber of Deputies (105). It is possible to sense her delight, although she is no longer as effusive as in the days of her earlier *Letters* and commentaries on Switzerland, as she observes a "wider diffusion of knowledge" as a result of the revolution (108). However, on the horizon were political struggles to challenge Williams's liberal principles.

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[137] Williams credits him with a reputation for "analyzing precision, and persuasive eloquence" (108). She had always shown her appreciation of the "eloquence" of speakers from the time she commented on its evidence among the Girondin Deputies early in the 1790s.

Despite her evident approval of evidence of increased political involvement, Williams seems critical when she observes that "nothing now obtains the privilege of engrossing the public mind but politics" (106). She laments that the French are "less habitually occupied by literature," although the works of Rousseau and Voltaire had again "descended from their shelves" (106). She is disappointed that people have lost interest in the long discussions on works of "great writers" once so "minutely analysed" (107).

As a woman intellectual, used to the company and salon conversations of other male and female intellectuals over a period of thirty years, she was perhaps no longer a part of the more vibrant gatherings such as she had once experienced. Evidence of this is suggested by the observations of Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, who five years earlier had represented Williams as a "faded old woman" after her visit in April 1816 to "one of the idols of her girlhood" on the Rue de Bondy (*The Wild Irish Girl* 1936: 42). It is worth describing the scene at length since it is one of the only ones yet available of a salon at Williams's home. Owenson entered a room lit by a few candles which "dimly discovered the vastness of the room" containing a row of bonnets. They turned out to be "many intelligent but not very blooming countenances."[138] Small groups of men were "scattered in earnest conversation; and tea and refreshments were serving round by a servant who looked as wise and literary as the rest of the party" (113).

Now alone, after the deaths of her mother in 1812 and Stone in 1818, Williams was, doubtless, less buoyant in spirits than in the past, yet she was still to write two more books and publish an anthology of poetry. The salon activity which accompanied her later life was far removed from the elaborate trappings of the setting observed when she had visited Elizabeth Montagu's assembles in London. Then there had been rooms "lined with painted paper of Pekin, and furnished with the choicest movables of China. A long table covered with the finest linen, [presenting] to the view a thousand glittering cups" (Doran 196). In 1820, Williams remained a serious intellectual, deeply involved in the politics of France. Her intellect was engaged with the issues that occupied the statesmen and literary intelligentsia who evidently chose to visit her for the quality of conversation and society, and were evidently unconcerned about the subdued nature of the surroundings. Williams observes that:

> persons of taste, no doubt, can never become insensible to the charm of polite literature, the chosen delight of elegant minds, the soothing relief of that solitude to which the world leaves the unhappy, and the dearest resource against the weariness of life which sometimes besets the prosperous. (*Letters* 107)

Scarcely weary of life, but perhaps saddened by loss of close family, Williams was to continue her "career" in political commentary, and as a poet. During the constitutional monarchy of Louis XVIII, her ideals were to face fresh challenges to which she would respond capably.

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[138] One of the women was possibly Sophie Granchamp, a friend who aided in the translation of Williams's work (Woodward 112).

The Bourbon Challenge to Williams's "Creed"

Williams's series of sixteen letters published in 1819 were intended to provide a sketch of the contemporary situation in France since July 8, 1815. In the first of the series Williams characteristically defends the ideals to which she had remained faithful since the early days of revolution in 1789. As she was later to reiterate in her final reflections published in 1827, the disillusioning failures of the political changes failed to obliterate her enthusiasm for the cause of liberty. She acknowledges the source of her initial attraction to the revolutionary activities when she notes that "where the feelings and affections of the mind have been powerfully called forth by the attraction of some great object, we are not easily cured of a long cherished predilection" (2).

It has been evident throughout this study of Williams's intellectual and emotional response to her life experiences that she retained certain ideals with respect to theories on liberty. While acknowledging the failure of the realization of the hopes of those who had first theorized about a more ideal civil society for France, she reminds her readers that her pangs of disappointment were shared by others like her who had believed as firmly as she did in "the first promises of the revolution"(2). However, she assumes that they, like her, continue "to love liberty" (2). Excusing her lack of extended public commentary on France since her letters of 1795, she cites, as she did in the 1815 commentary, her feeling of discouragement, but acknowledges that the intervening years had been crowded with "stupendous events that usually fill the lapse of ages" (3).

Several lines of her explanation clearly capture the political instability of the time following the new order of government, and remind the reader of the days of the Terror following the first phase of the 1789 Revolution. Although lacking for most the former horrors of anarchy, the waves of political upheaval, the trauma of wars, and the constantly changing government decrees did not cease with the restoration of the monarchy. She feels disillusioned after her earlier hopeful expectations of the restored Bourbon government. Sadly she conveys the fact that:

> the oligarchic party, the unchanged and incurable adherents of the ancient despotism, seized the reins of government with all their train of protections and privileges, their exaltation at the present, and their resentment of the past. (5)

To impress upon the reader the extent of their opposition to ideals that she held dear, she records that the new ministers thought the time was appropriate when "revolutionary principles of equal rights, independence, toleration, and whatever else belonged to that order of things, might be crushed for ever"(5). Her comments concerning Louis XVIII show her to have remained as sympathetic to the person of the monarch as she had been for Louis XVI in 1792. She asserts that the King "almost singly, and in vain opposed their measures" (5).

After noting the extremely centralized nature of government by the autocratic

Bonaparte, and the fact that the former mode of "governing in detail" had returned, she provides other evidence of retrogressive action observing disdainfully that, not only the prefects, but the sub-prefects were chosen from among the nobles. Even the country mayors were seigneurs, who often remained quietly in their chateaux, and sent their *valets-de chambre* to govern the villages. The departmental administrations were all consequently of the same opinion that the people were to be brought back to their former condition previous to the Revolution. "Vexations were every where practiced, and complaint was every where termed sedition" (13-14). She also conveys a sense of the civil war which broke out in parts of France, observing that "[i]n some parts . . . the heated imaginations of the people were wrought up to a sort of frenzy: French blood was once more spilt by Frenchmen, and assassinations and massacres took place at Marseilles, Avignon, and Nimes" (14).

After the restoration of Louis XVIII in 1815, a constitutional parliamentary monarchy had been affirmed. It acknowledged the social reform entrenched in the Napoleonic code of law. Representation was not democratic since the right to vote was limited to 100,000 substantial property owners. During the first elections, the ultra-royalists were overwhelmingly in control of parliament, but the Chamber of Deputies who "represented not the French nation, but the *ultra* faction" (62) was dissolved in 1816 since they sought to undo the changes brought by the revolution. Williams asserts that it was the king who determined this dissolution. There was a concern that the Ultra-royalists, led by Louis's brother Charles, might destabilize France by attempting to return to the old order. As noted earlier in this chapter, Williams had accused them of wishing to return to the earlier despotic form of government.

The Challenge Abates

Despite Williams's initial fear about the influence of the *Ultras*, a more moderate parliament evolved, although she remained critical of what she perceived to be a lack of political "maturity" in France, and she sensed that political violence was a constant threat. New elections in 1816 placed the moderate royalists in control of the parliament with a liberal opposition until 1820. Williams characterized the new Chamber of Deputies as containing some men "of most eminent abilities," and approaching "nearer to the Constituent Assembly than any subsequent legislation" (64). Commenting on the tendency among the representatives to voice their opinions, Williams suggests that the French still had not reached maturity in its mode of national representation. This she attributes to their inability to recognize that it was "not necessary to the welfare of the state, that every member should speak, but the duty of the majority to listen" (64). She was critical of the lack of interrogations of ministers of the kind that prevailed in the British House of Commons (65). Also "what passes could not properly be called discussion" and bore little resemblance to debate (65). The process by which a member was able to express his views also created problems. Having to leave his place to speak at the tribune often chilled the "glow of feeling" on the way so that with ideas dispersed, sentiments evaporated, and energies "sunk to the ceremonial," he might ultimately find himself with nothing to say (66). The Chamber consisted of parties so greatly differing in opinions that it divided into four groups: the *Ultras*, the *Centre*, the *Doctrinaires* and "though last, not least," the *Liberaux*, or *Independans* (67). Williams assesses the *Ultras* as continuing to "go back two centuries in search of the French title to distinction and glory" and their "dreams consisting of popular insurrections and conspiracies" (68). The *Doctrinaires* were the partisans of liberal opinions, yet neither "men of the ministry or men of the opposition," choosing to treat political questions in a "metaphysical and abstract manner" (69).

It was the *Liberaux* whom she credited as adhering to the cause of freedom, as the "vanguard of French liberty" (69), men who "overthrew the old despotism and who made the revolution" (70). To Williams, these were the most eloquent speakers and defenders "of the rights of mankind" (72). In 1817, a new law for elections that restricted the right of voting to those paying a direct tax of 300 francs a year, placed the elections "in the hands of the most respectable and independent of the community" (77). More moderate policies were followed under the liberal minister Decazes. When he was removed in an ultra-royalist plot, the traditionalists remained stronger than the Constitutionalists.

The potential for a destabilization of the French political system returned in

1824 when Louis XVIII was succeeded by his brother Charles, who attempted to restore the old absolutist order of the pre-Revolutionary Bourbons, and became unpopular. Ironically the liberals returned as a majority government in the year of Williams's death in 1827.

Williams's Attempt to Avoid the *"Genre Ennuyeux"*

Williams provided "a great deal of information[139]" in her *Letters* of 1819, and described at length the course of the intrigues in politics. Also, she characteristically annotated the "facts" with her opinions and observations in regard to education and the increased involvement of citizens in reading and discussing politics. In a 1819 letter to Henry Crabb Robinson, Williams points out that despite the amount of detail, *Letters* was not a "dry narrative" (Woodward 184). She conveys the fact that she had "endeavoured to avoid the worst of all modes of writing, "*le genre ennuyeux*" (184). Although factual material is more evident than in her previous political commentaries, Williams evidently believed that her "annotations" through the comments like those alluded to above and on religion preserved her narrative from *le genre ennuyeux*. She is indeed less effusive, and picturesque than in past commentaries, perhaps in response to criticisms of her style in the English press, and the contemporary reaction against a style that attempted to evoke an emotional response to political content. The writing of more "objective" factual content evidently did not have the same appeal to her as her former style. In her meeting with Wordsworth in 1820, she felt "much pleasure" in leaving the world of "politics, the laws of elections, and the charter … while she was led by (his) society to the world of poetical illusion, so full of charms and from which (she had) been so long in exile"[140] (190).

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[139] She indicates this aspect of the *Letters* in a letter to Henry Crabb Robinson in March 1819. Woodward quotes from the unpublished letter (184). It was apparently available in 1930 at Dr Williams's Library in London, although a response to my 1998 inquiry indicated that no letters of Williams are now available there.

In an attempt to avoid boring her readers, Williams continued to annotate her texts with opinions and reflections. She expressed her delight at the way in which elections were conducted compared to the turbulence of the past, and turned their thoughts to the differences in the English system. She observes that the French "displayed the noble spectacle of a people exercising their new privileges with calmness and dignity--although, of course, it was not the completely representative democracy." However, she notes that it was what the "Ultras call[ed] democratic, and the nation at large, a constitution" (78). She reminds her readers that the type of "hustings of Westminster would prove highly dangerous at Paris" (79). The reason for this was that English could "venture to be as tumultuous," but in France such an involvement had the potential of producing a dangerous "torrent," reminiscent of the old turmoil. Praising England and her countrymen for their "gymnastic exercises"(79) in elections, she confessed that she had been "nurtured in the belief that whatever they do for liberty, they do well." However, the fact that she believed that France as a representative government was not "robust enough to bear hard blows" (79) is indicative of her fear that the violence of the 1790s could still return. She had detected elements of this in the religious persecution in Avignon, Marseilles and Nimes in 1815 (4). She had then believed that "fanaticism, long since driven from every enlightened part of Europe, had . . . no refuge but on the other side of the Pyrennes, under the auspices of the throne and the inquisition" (15).

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[140] From Woodward I quote again from an unpublished letter from Dr. Williams's Library.

Returning to familiar theme of excusing the excesses of the French revolution, she contends that the nation had been "roused from a state of slavery as ancient as its origin, and [was] stimulated by the long accumulated and traditional hatred of ages against oppression" (180).[141] She excuses again the problems of the violence occasioned in the political struggles since the days of Robespierre noting: "How difficult for such a nation, at such a moment, not to go astray and commit fatal errors, sometimes mistaking anarchy for freedom, and sometimes conquest for glory!" (180). She further observes that in 1819, "representative government [was] unfolding itself in France" (180). With her usual optimism, she believed that it would soon "rise to its full growth and vigour" (180). She also refers to the fact, as she did in her letters of the 1790s, that the more recent problems and bloodshed occasioned by the

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[141] Her contentions raise the thoughts of the anti-colonial feeling in the last century and the problems which the repression and injustice practiced by colonists engendered.

"aristocratical party" struggle in 1815 might have ended in more devastation if the nation had not been "united in its resistance" (181).

Williams was always aware of the "lesson" in political struggles, and in this sense saw all the evolution of citizen involvement in politics as an education. In publicizing her views and commenting on events, she is very much aware of "instructing," of cautioning the readers to take notice of the lessons to be learnt in the course of political development. She concludes that Louis XVIII was enlightened, that he was sympathetic to the nation's rights and opposed "with his royal authority whatever is treason against constitutional liberty" (181). However, she asserts there will remain in the "bosom of the nation" (181), two hostile powers of "aristocracy and fanaticism" (182). The thought of fanaticism turns her mind to religion and she writes of the domination of the priests contending that the nation wishes "moral religion and civic priests" (182). Throughout *Letters* it is noticeable that she is confident enough to speak for the nation. She had done so in her earliest commentaries thirty years previously when she was reflecting the voices of those she considered the "enlightened, liberal" spokespeople for the nation.

Williams Concern for Religious Liberty

In a supplementary letter added to *Letters* Williams professes knowledge of "reports highly injurious to French protestants" (184) that were being circulated by English travelers. Her criticisms are reminiscent of those directed at her by critical English reviewers of her earlier publications. She comments that the "reveries of

French society and manners, and their exaggerated narratives of places and persons, have a whimsical air of romance, in which truth is set boldly at defiance, but where deception leads to no serious consequences" (184). Lamenting the disparagement of French Protestants by certain traveling English clergymen, Williams objects to the damage done to the trust that the French Protestants had in English support. Critical of the tales of inappropriate attitudes shown by the French toward the Sabbath, she notes that throughout France, Sunday is not celebrated as a "rigid day of seclusion, but of liberty and gladness" (194).. In one of few references to her religious upbringing, she alludes to her childhood experiences in " all the severity of dissenting principles" (194). She had continued this early "strict observance of the Sabbath" throughout her life. Referring to recent violence against Protestants in the south of France, (in 1816, Williams wrote an account of the persecution of Protestants in Languedoc), she blames the *Ultras*, who supported Catholicism (195). In the final printed letter of her writing career, Williams provides a reminder to the reader that she had always supported religious freedom just as she had endorsed "enlightened" political and literary liberty.

In the following section I include the positive assessments and observations of those who met with Williams at this stage in her life together with those hostile to her, in particular the anti-Jacobean press that was a reminder of the hostility and fanaticism she warned of in regard to France. Such hostility, the result of fanaticism, was directed at her, and served to discredit her and encourage her neglect.

Contemporary Attitudes toward Williams in the Counter-Revolutionary Years

Between 1801 and 1819, Williams's writing appears to have lost the appeal it possessed in the 1790s. This was due partly to the disparagement of her character by the anti-Jacobin Press in England, and partly to a change in the literary preferences of British readers. To gain a better understanding of the continuing importance and renown of Williams in Paris, I consider it necessary to indicate evidence of the context of Williams's experience of social and literary life from 1801 to 1821. It is a period when her writing was considered less popular and important, and when the press reviled her and others who had been supportive of the revolution and who favored political reform. However, during most of these years, she was hosting a renowned salon attended by members of government, foreign dignitaries, and *literati* from France and other countries.

Writing of his visit to Paris in 1801, William Shepherd provides an indication of the type of gathering which could then be found at Miss Williams's "tea-parties" (*Paris* 1814: 77). He records at length one of the few glimpses yet available of such occasions and for this reason, and for the impression it provides of reactions to Williams, I think it appropriate to quote it fully. He and his wife were invited to Williams's house on the Quai Malaquais:

> Here we found a numerous assemblage of natives of various parts of Europe, some French gentlemen, members of the legislative body--the ex-director Carnot--a Neapolitan Principessa--a Bishop of the same country--a Polish countess--the *ci-devant* viceroy of Sardinia--several English gentlemen . . . and General Kosciusko. This party was soon divided into various groups, each of which was engaged in its peculiar subject of conversation. I could not but admire the judicious politeness with which our hostess equally distributed her attentions among her numerous guests; and I was not a little gratified . . .

> after I had the honour of two or three conversations with her, to attend Mrs. S. to her assemblies as often as we could make it. (78)

In 1821 Williams was still hosting *literati*. Samuel Rogers called on her in August 1821, and gave Clayden an "amusing account of the visit" where "the set of French *bleus* assembled to hear a reading of the *Memoires de Nelson*" (*Rogers* 1889: 310-311).

In August 1802, Thomas Poole also provided an impression of another of her gatherings. He observed in a letter to Coleridge: "You meet [at Williams's *conversations*] a very interesting society. Many of the *literati*. A poet and a poetess recited some verses about to be published. I met Lord Holland, the American and Swiss Ambassador, Carnot etc." (*Thomas Poole and his Friends* 1888 II: 90).

Among clergymen remaining within her circle was Pastor Marron, mentioned in the Introduction of this study as a friend of Williams who provided her with evidence of *maison d'arrèts* in 1793, and sent her a poem which clearly identified her vision about liberal politics. He had remained her friend since the early 1790s. In her *Narrative on Events* in 1815, she comments on his status as President of the Protestant Church in France, and the ascription to him of the name "*Monsieur le Pape Protestant*" (91) by Napoleon. At this stage, she no doubt obtained information from Marron and his associates on the state of the Protestants in France which, together with her preoccupation with politics, provided a major theme for her *Letters*. It is also evident from *Souvenirs* that Williams would have been fully informed about many aspects of legislation since she was well acquainted with members of the Napoleonic government such as Benjamin Constant, and Thiesse (152). She describes a time when she met Napoleon while riding in the Bois de Boulogne with Thiesse, "*un de mes meilleurs et plus anciens amis*"(132) [one of my best and oldest friends]. Her elder nephew, Athanase, was also a member of the Chamber of Deputies.

According to John Goldworth Alger, who was critical of Williams, Charles Fox was criticized in England for "taking tea" with her. He also notes that she was visited by Lord Holland and Granville Sharp "though some English held aloof or even sneered at her" (*Napoleon's British Visitors*: 140-141).

In July 1814, the diarist and Dissenter, Henry Crabb Robinson visited Paris and has provided a description of Williams and her situation at the time. An entry to his journal on September 4th provides a rare glimpse of her home life, which at this time was in the Rue de Bondy. It also shows the prejudice he had imbibed from English friends concerning her. To his surprise, she and Stone made a favorable impression on him. He also notes her preoccupation with the theme of liberty throughout her writings, and it is evident that she was still as interested in speaking about politics, as is evident from the gatherings at her homes. Robinson acknowledges that he had read and enjoyed Williams's early publications and he terms her a "*preacher of liberty*" at the beginning of the Revolution, whom he had previously suspected of having been since an apologist of French tyranny. She talked freely with him on political subjects "without restraint" and he became convinced that "all her sentiments . . . were always English." Robinson found the opinions of Miss Williams were "all quite moderate, but that she detested Napoleon, believing him a despot, and not cautious about this point in her conversation. Stone had indicated to Robinson that Bonaparte was their enemy, "in consequence of Miss Williams refusing to write in his favour, and [he] would have persecuted them had they not had friends among members of the police"(*Diaries* VIII: 56). Williams evidently had the friendship of French politicians, men and women among French *literati*, and the respect of certain visitors from England including Wordsworth whose first sonnet had been written with her in mind.

A Disparaging Press Attempts to Silence Williams

Just as evident as the friendship and respect she enjoyed are her detractors. In the preface of her *Sketches on the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic* written towards the end of the eighteenth century, Williams alluded to the unpleasant misrepresentation of herself in the British press.

> I am aware of the censure which has been thrown on writers of the female sex who have sometimes employed their pens in political subjects; nor am I ignorant that my name has been mentioned with abuse by journalists, calling themselves Anti-Jacobins. But however malignant may be the aim, these Anti- Jacobin darts fly harmless; those who have lived amidst the scenes of the French Revolution, have learnt to parry or despise more formidable weapons. (*Sketches* 1801 Preface)

Despite the respect for her among those quoted earlier in this chapter, Williams was denigrated by more traditional counter-revolutionary elements of the British press and others who decried her high profile in France, whether because she was a woman or because of her political involvement, and who wished to discredit and silence her.

The following entry from a poem, "The Union of Liberty," in the *Anti-Jacobin* of 1801 provides a sample of the public attacks on her character:

Then came Maria Helen Williams Stone,[1]
Sitting upon a goat with bearded chin;
And she hath written volumes many a one;
Better the idle jade had learned to spin -
Dearly she loves the philanthropic sin,
Call'd fornication - and doth it commit;
Nor cared she for modesty a pin,
And laughs at Satan and the burning pit;
Ah! dame! belike one day you'll know the truth of it. (July 9 510)

The fact that she had lived in various residences in France with Stone, and that he had been indicted in the Treason Trials of 1794, added to popular British perception of her as immoral, misguided, if not dangerous. A different perception of her provided by friends and acquaintances like Pastor Marron, Joel Barlow, William Wordsworth, Thomas Poole, William Shepherd and Henry Crabb Robinson are probably better reflections of the reality.

As noted above, the Anti-Jacobin press was merciless in its maligning of her along with those of similar ideologies, and of her association. In the opening verse of a lengthy poem entitled "New Morality," the *Anti-Jacobin* restates the intent of its publication: "to expose and destroy the fertile . . . Falsehoods of the Jacobins" (4). With the hope "From mental mists to purge a Nation's eyes / To animate the weak, with the wise / O'er the fair realms of Science, hearing, Taste; / To drive and scatter all the brood of lies / And chase the varying Falsehood, as it flies" (*Anti-Jacobin* 1801:

623). Mention of Williams appears thirteen pages later placing her in the company of Coleridge, Southey, Priestley, Paine, Godwin and Holcroft, all charged with following the Swiss theophilanthropist, Lepaux: [142]

> And ye five other wandering Bards that move
> In sweet accord of harmony and love,
> C----DGE and S--TH--Y, L----P, and L---BE and Co
> Tune all your mystic harps to praise LEPAUX!
>
> PR---TL---Y and W---F---LD, humble, holy men,
> Give praise to his name with tongue and pen!
> TH---LW---L, and ye that lecture as you go,
> And for your pains get pelted, praise LEPAUX
>
> Praise him each Jacobin, or Fool, or Knave,
> And your cropp'd heads in sign of worship wave!
> All creeping creatures, venomous, and low,
> PAINE, W--LL--MS, G-DW--N, H-L-CR-FT ---Praise LEPAUX ! (1798: 636)

The journalists of her time attacked Williams's character in order to silence her. As can be seen from her active social involvement between 1798 and at least 1823, they were only partially successful.

In 1814, Humboldt had some difficulty persuading Longman publishers to produce her translation of his work (unpublished letter from Williams to Robinson: Dr Williams's Library cited by Woodward: 185). That Robinson had difficulty procuring a publisher for her sixteen 1819 *Letters*, is understandable given the reputation ascribed to her by her detractors, and her continuation of a writing style that was less popular than in the previous century. She comments scathingly about the difficulties he had experienced (June 1819):

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[142] Williams comments on him and the sect he organized in her Swiss travels.

> I have been so long absent from England that I had really forgotten there was such a species of animal as your Newmans, Ridgeways etc. – booksellers are as interested in Paris as in London, but they never forget to be polite. (188)

Nevertheless, her text found a publisher. As a result we have a more comprehensive view of Williams's continuing interest in and ascription to her former principles.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the mood and style of Williams's political commentaries from 1815 to 1819, and their similarity in some aspects to the earlier 1790s commentaries, caused me to think back to the quotation of Naylor with which I introduced Chapter VII. It is apparent to me that whether recording the horrors of devastation felt during "convulsive" political change, or the joys realized or anticipated in possible success, Williams had extended the "sensibility" which Naylor limited to the recording of triumphs of "insulted freedom" to her chronicles of "despotism" (Naylor 92). She had not depended on "providence in mercy to deaden her feelings" (92), but had always been desirous of a sensibility which gave her the ability to feel intensely both joy and sorrow.

Her faith in liberty and her capacity to sustain sensibility over forty years of intellectually and emotionally challenging experiences, leads me to conclude that a combination of these qualities affected her like a religious creed. Indeed there are numerous occasions in her discourse when such a "creed" created in her an ability to transcend the moment whether to contemplate the future socio-political destiny of humanity or the sublimity of the metaphysical in experience. These dimensions of her writing are also indicated in her last two publications. An anthology of her poetry, published in 1823, and a defense of her political "career" in *Souvenirs* in 1827 provide a glimpse of a deeply sensitive, intellectually and socially involved individual. The impression is of someone quite beyond the seeming limitations of a " faded old woman" presented by Sydney Owenson in 1816.

CONCLUSION

"Lifting the Veil" on the Future

> *Beaucoup d'autres iront chercher la révolution dans les livres, mais, moi, je la raconte; les incidens du récit sont dans ma mémoire, et les émotions qu'ils ont produites sont encore dans mon cœur. . . [J'ai] toujour essayé de justifer ce que la révolution a fait d'excusable, de déplorer ce qu'elle a fait de mal, et surtout d'admirer ce qu'elle a fait de sublime . . . .[La France] avec l'aide de ces institutions libres qu'elle a payées du prix d'une révolution, s'avancera rapidement et se reposers dans la liberté.*[143]
>
> Helen Maria Williams *Souvenirs* 1827:200-201

> If men could learn from history, what lessons it might teach us! But passion and party blind our eyes, and the light which experience gives is a lantern on the stern, which shines only on the waves behind us.
>
> Samuel Taylor Coleridge *Letters* December 18, 1831.

> If it were felt that the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being . . . there would be no danger that liberty would be undervalued, and the adjustment between it and social control would present no serious difficulty. But the evil is, that individual spontaneity is hardly recognized by the common modes of thinking as having any intrinsic worth, or deserving any regard on its own account.
>
> John Stuart Mill *On Liberty* 1859:261.

In the last pages of the final reflections on her writing career, Williams reminds her reader of her past intent and her liberal values. As I have attempted to show in this study, she often deplored the determiners of "passion and party" that blinded "*cette force toute morale qui s'appuie sur la raison*" [that moral force which is supported by reason] (*Souvenirs* 200).

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[143] " Many others search for the history of the revolution in books, but, I tell it; the events I narrate are in my memory, and the emotion they produced are still in my heart . . . I have always tried to justify what the revolution did that was excusable, deploring what was injurious, but above all admiring what was sublime in it . . . .[France], with the aid of liberal institutions, for which she paid the price of revolution, will rapidly advance, and settle down in liberty." She adds that such a state is "the prayer of all the friends of human dignity." (*Souvenirs de la Révolution française*). *Souvenirs* was translated into French by Williams's nephew Charles Coquerel, and no longer appears to be extant in English.

In her reveries and annotations contained in *Souvenirs*, and in the later poems of her 1823 anthology, the voice of Williams as an agitator for political reform through the medium of commentaries and poems breaks through the veil of the intervening years. It reminds the reader of her close association of the two genres. Nearing the time of the "*hospitalité d'un tombeau*" [the hospitality of the grave] (201), she leaves clear footnotes to her life in the private and public domain. Poetic evidence of these may be found among her nineteenth century poetry. In *Ode to Peace* between France and Britain at Amiens in 1801, she returns to expression of the political "feelings" that she had indulged in the 1780s:

> My Country! When with tyrant-hosts combined –
> O, hideous conquest, had thy sword prevail'd,
> And crowned the impious league against mankind!
> ...
> Ah, rather haste to Concord's holy shrine,
> Ye rival nations with joy elate;
> And bind the wounds of no immortal hate.
> ...
> O Liberty, those demons far remove,
> Come, nymph severely good, sublimely great!
> Nor to the raptur'd hope of mortals prove
> Like those illusive dreams that pass the iv'ry gate[144].

Poems to her two nephews, Athanase and Charles, indicate a part of the ambience of her domestic sphere about which she rarely commented in her published work. Welcoming them home, that "cherished spot of magic power," after their school year in 1809, she reminds them of her care for them as a mother, and a "mother's love!" which has sought to keep from them "all ill."[145] To Athanase on his wedding day in 1819, she writes "The Charter." It suggests that her life had been made joyful by him and his brother when she was "to sorrow doomed in all the rest / and only in her children blest." She advises--in a manner that indicates her concern about inequality in the politics of marriage-"No principles of feudal sway / Teaches without loving to obey. / The heart such joyless homage slights / And wedlock claims its Bill of Rights!"

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[144] *Poems*, 1823: Reproduced from the English Poetry Full-Text Database (Chadwyck-Healey Ltd. 1995)

In *Souvenirs* Williams defends herself against attacks on her method of following the vagaries of "Liberty" through the maze of a protracted revolution in the French government. In detail, she reiterates many of the incidents and observations made in all her previous political commentaries from the start of the revolution--commentaries examined in the course of this study. She also provides an insight into the future of liberalism that she anticipates may enlighten the remaining years of the nineteenth century. With characteristic optimism on the topic of liberty and civic virtue, she comments:

> *La résistance des nations contre l'arbitraires sera ferme et constante, et cette liberté, qui est terrible quand elle s'égare, comme le feu électrique qu'une main ignorante ne peut conduire, saura cependant, respecter de justes limites, si elle est contenue par les lumières qui sont bien plus puissantes que la force.* [The resistance of nations to arbitrary government will be firm and constant,

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[145] Williams wrote this on St. Helen's Day as a future reminder to them of herself.

> and liberty, which is terrible when she goes astray, like a lightning fire that one ignorant hand cannot control, will nevertheless remain within just limits, if she is contained by enlightened insights that are more proficient than force.] (200)

Such observations by her, and the descriptions of her salon activity in the previous chapter of this study, indicate that in her sixties Williams still remained involved in the political and literary spheres of interest that she had entered in her youth. Evidence both from her poetry and prose show that her emotions were still engaged in both these areas. The fact that at this time, in the 1820s, the liberals were in ascendance in French politics doubtless contributed to her optimistic mood which had characteristically surfaced after setbacks to her wish to see the success of more liberal systems, the evolution of which, she had spent her career documenting.

A Retrospective and a Projection

In my conclusion to this study of Williams, I attempt to provide the echoes of her voice at the time when it begins to fade out of history, and she anticipates her own demise. In the late 1820s, it is still informed by the essence of her lifelong preoccupation with "liberty," the evolution of civil society, and the sensibility that remained a characteristic of her personality and her writing style.

At this stage in my study--as I reread Williams's final recorded words, I questioned again the course "liberty" had traveled in the eighteenth century to cause Williams's defense of it. I sought another voice from a researcher in literature and history to identify it, since I have presented Williams from the perspective of my own background in intellectual history and education, adding in the contextualization necessary to acknowledge her position in the eighteenth century literary style of Sensibility. In Michael Meehan's *Liberty and Aesthetics*, I found a summary of his conclusions about the assaults on "freedom's benefits." It reflects the view of a scholar in history and literature on two of the themes concerning politics and aesthetics, which I have attempted to blend within the examination of Williams. Meehan[146] contends that such "assaults" on liberty have "coloured the response to the surfacing of political ideas and attitudes in the eighteenth century to the aesthetic debate ever since" (*Liberty* 3). From critics of some of the perceived excesses of liberty, he observes:

> The Goddess of Liberty, that "petulant, ignorant silly, creature," received a most ungentlemanly reception [in the journals] throughout the later decades [of the eighteenth century] – and it is possible to cite authoritative dismissals of the whole tendency from the period: from Chesterfield, the association of the arts and freedom was merely a "gross, local prejudice." [From] Joseph Warton, it was an idea in need of great modification, and for Johnson, it was at best ridiculous and at worst dangerous, reducing important questions to commonplaces, inducing the nation to repose its faith in that most vacuous and manipulable of all concepts, liberty, and distracting poets of considerable talent . . . from their proper poetic concern. (3)

Meehan observes how past research has presented the "influence of liberty" in the decades following 1668. It was presented as portrayed by such "strident Whigs as Dennis, Addison[147] and Shaftesbury, [and] repeated *ad nauseam* thereafter by unoriginal minds, withered under Hume's skepticism, and the manifest failure of liberty to deliver, and was then thankfully forgotten" (3). He concludes, "this was not the case."

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[146] Meehan's dissertation research was undertaken with guidance from Howard Erskine-Hill at Pembroke College Cambridge, and his later book completed in Australia in 1986.

[147] In her *Letters* of 1792, Williams quoted one of Addison's verses on Liberty which begins: "Oh, Liberty, thou goddess heav'nly bright, / Profuse of bliss, and pregnant with delight!" Since she cites Addison elsewhere and subscribed to the glories of "Liberty" it may be inferred that such writing influenced her attitude and rhetoric on the subject.

Meehan's study was written as a protest against the manner in which the political component in the work of a number of well-known writers was treated in the eighteenth century. He suggests that when their ideas "veered closer to that political culture than to a respectable 'philosophical' tradition they have either been ignored altogether or dismissed as routine Whig polemic"(3). After my study of Williams, it is my contention that this, to some degree, is what happened to Williams in her attempts to combine politics and aesthetics. The fact that she was a woman provided another reason for the indifference accorded her.

Meehan cites Wordsworth, Shaftesbury and Ferguson as writers who explored "the higher possibilities of British liberty and the nature of the tradition, which produced it" (155). It was with interest[148] that I noted Meehan's reference to T.S.Eliot's belief in the need for the "cultivation of the arts with liberty," and the relation of both to a program for "national regeneration"(155). In Williams's poetry and prose I have indicated evidence of her belief in the need for a vibrant progressive evolution in the arts[149].

Wordsworth was a figure connected to Williams by a tie of their mutual admiration for each other's work and politics. Meehan notes that Wordsworth's ideas about "distinct national cultures evolving under the aegis of freedom and independence," (159) and also the "grander hopes" of Wordsworth and Coleridge for "an ambitious sense of the spiritual capabilities of a free community" (159). Throughout this study I have alluded to Williams's contention, and that of her mentors in Dissent, that recognition of an ecumenical spiritual dimension of humanity is necessary to enlightenment and understanding. Meehan's voice drew my attention to more recent protest against the nineteenth century neglect of the combining of politics and aesthetics[150] by writers like Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, and caused me to perceive another reason for the neglect of Williams's work by her contemporaries.

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[148] "interest" because of my earlier reference to Eliot in relation to Williams in the Introduction to this study.

[149] This was particularly noticeable in her *Ode on the Peace* in 1787 and on several occasions throughout her commentaries.

Williams's appeal to readers as a radical publicist was to involve themselves in politics. She made the appeal through the language of Sensibility, of the *coeur sensible*, the heart *in* the mind, when considering and analyzing the political culture of her times. The fact that she sustained her focus, and the aesthetic voice with which she clothed it, throughout the forty years of her writing career, is indicative of a far more serious commitment to the progress of political-social aesthetic culture than has yet been ascribed to her. Her observations in *Events* alluded to in Chapter VIII make clear her awareness of the gradual evolution of political involvement by the French population through the revolutionary process she had witnessed. She also identified the important role that education had played in this development. The activities of the "insensate" masses of 1789 had evolved into more "dignified" debates, interested responses to political literature, and elected, though limited, representation in the 1820s.

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[150] In the last decade New Historicism has begun to redress the neglect of the politics and aesthetics.

In this section I have attempted a retrospective on Williams, an indication of her projected direction for political progress, and also a projection of my own positioning of Williams in the political-aesthetic debate. A further projection and acknowledgement remains. Since I assert that Williams is a precursor of liberal political-social thought, it has been necessary for me to indicate the reasons for this ascription. The following section briefly examines her assertions relevant to eighteenth century views of liberalism--of which she was an advocate--in relation to later nineteenth century liberalism, the evolution of which she predicted in the closing pages of *Souvenirs*.

Eighteenth Century Ideas on Liberty as Precursors of Later Liberal Thought

In any consideration of Williams's attitude towards the "liberty" issue, it is relevant to consider the way in which thoughts about this concept in the late eighteenth century was indicative of the initiation of the theories that evolved a generation later.

In his essay on "civil or social liberty," John Stuart Mill notes that liberty was "protection against tyranny [and that] the aim of patriots was to set limits to the power which the ruler should be suffered to exercise over the community." He observes "[l]iberty, as a principle has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become acceptable of being improved by free and equal discussion . . ." Until such a time he observes that they are doomed to obedience to an authority (*Collected Works* 110). He acknowledges that the notion of liberty was not

> necessarily disturbed by such temporary aberrations as those of the French Revolution, the worst of which were the work of the usurping few, and which, in any case, belonged not to the permanent working out of popular institutions, but to a sudden and convulsive outbreak against monarchical and aristocratic despotism.[151] (*On Liberty* 951)

In identifying one of the reasons for the lack of political awareness and general knowledge of the French population at the beginning of the Revolution, Williams pointed to the limited access of the majority to writings other than religious texts, and their tendency to comply with church-state authority. She was addressing the problem of the inability of the majority to participate in freedom of conscience, and reasoned political action. Both she and her associates of radical liberal inclinations believed a time would come when this would be more viable, and according to her belief, was divinely ordained. No doubt, had she lived several decades later, she would have concurred with some of Mill's views. He maintained that there was a need to acknowledge "liberty of conscience in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical, or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological" (958). These were also beliefs of Williams's mentors in Dissent as indicated in the works of Kippis, Priestley and Price. She also subscribed to the belief that there should be the freedom to publish opinions, and to meet to discuss opinions, if neither of these harm others--another contention by Mills. This is evident in comments in Williams's *Events* as indicated in Chapter VIII of this study when she approved the increasing tendency for large groups to debate politics, and disapproved of close censorship of the press.

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[151] *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill.* Ed. Edwin A Burtt. I have also used the *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill.* Ed. J.M. Robson.

The problems inherent in political ideologies, and the limitations on citizen participation current in Williams's time, doubtless became evident to her as she reflected on the pre-Revolutionary Bourbon, Robespierre, and Napoleonic regimes. It is likely that this reflection reinforced in her the intent to appeal to her readers to become more conscious of the need to reduce the "tyranny of ignorance." Her concerns are evident throughout her publications from 1790 to 1827, and yet she retained her hopeful faith in the unfolding of a more just civil society. Reading Williams's quite different style of expression from that of Mill, one becomes aware how much her "sensibility" supported her persistence with regard to an enlightened form of liberty. This was not only in regard to her "radical sensibility," her empathy for humanitarian issues, but also because of her grounding in aesthetic sensibility. In earlier chapters of this study, I asserted that the differing emphasis with regard to the culture of sensibility by Jerome McGann and Chris Jones were both necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of its value. It is possible to gain a partial realization of the importance of it in Williams's life and work if only one view is acknowledged.

Unlike Mill, Williams wrote from experience of the people and situations that were involved in the practical issues of changing a constitution, and realized at first hand the complications involved. Also, she projected a woman's voice infused with a "feeling heart" in the style of sensibility adopted by some women writers and criticized by others, especially concerning women and politics. She observes:

> Is your heart at ease when you mediate on the destiny of this miserable race, whose lot at best is slavery, but who are at this moment the stupid victims of their tyrants' mercenary rage? . . . Oh what presumptuous folly, what insensible ignorance in those who rule the counsels of civilised nations, to have fostered a hope that France could ever become the prey of such slaves! (*Sketches* 52)

With regard to the styles and temperament of Mill and Williams, I was interested to note Mark van Doren's comment on nineteenth century lack of sensibility:

> Let us leave the thinking out and say again that Wordsworth, in a world which had forgotten the very alphabet of emotion, taught it to read again. So, at any rate was the conviction of John Stuart Mill, whom Wordsworth's poems saved from the depths of intellectual depression. (Wordsworth: *Selected Poetry* xxi)

Williams reflected the eighteenth century Culture of Sensibility and involvement as a radical political commentator. Wordsworth, who admired her early poetry, reflected the Culture of Romanticism. The following description of his writing captures for me an element evident in Williams's writing style. He explains in the Preface of *Lyrical Ballads:*

> The principal object . . . proposed in these poems, was to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same

> time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner we associate ideas in a state of excitement. (*Selected Poetry 677*)

Williams like Wordsworth, was an example of a writer for whom politics and aesthetics coalesced in her experiences; she did not rely on exclusively "philosophical" presentation. She was often in a "state of excitement" about "Liberty," and unlike Mill presented arguments in its defense that acknowledged both intellect and emotions in her particular style of trying to influence the future direction of political and educational progress.

Helen Maria Williams is a study of a woman who treasured her ability to "feel" and to empathize, and who spent her career trying to communicate with and provoke her readers through their emotions as well as their intellect.

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Appendix

Chronology

Helen Maria Williams (1761-1827)

1761: June 17	Helen Maria Williams is born in London, a second daughter to Charles Williams, formerly of Aberconway, Wales, and Helen Williams, née Hay, formerly of Naughton, Scotland.
1769	Death of Helen's father.
1770 (?)	Helen, her mother and sister, Cecilia, move to Berwick-on-Tweed in Northumberland.
1770-1781	Spends her early years in in Northumberland; and is raised in a milieu of Rational Dissent.
1781	Moves back to London with her family when Andrew Kippis offers to aid her publication of *Edwin and Eltruda, a legendary Tale* in verse.
1782	*Edwin and Eltruda* is published in March
1783	Begins to attend "Blue-stocking" assemblies, and becomes acquainted with women intellectuals in Elizabeth Montagu's *bas-bleu* circle. Presents manuscript of *Ode on the Peace* with a dedication to Elizabeth Montagu. Meets Samuel Johnson.
1784	Social circle includes William Hayley, Sarah Siddons, George Romney, and Richard Kiwain. Publication of epic poem, *Peru.* Meets Monique Coquerel, an emigrée, French tutor, wife of Augustin du Fossé. Prepares two volumes of poems for publication aided by George Hardinge
1785	*Poems* published. Meets Augustin du Fossé and becomes interested in the injustice in the French political system.
1786	Corresponds with Robert Burns after an introduction by Dr. John Moore. James Currie, first editor of Burns's work offers to aid publication of her poem on the slave trade. Now living in the

	district of Bloomsbury with her mother and sister. Becomes acquainted with Samuel Rogers. Meets Hester Piozzi, and Joshua Reynolds. William Wordsworth writes sonnet: *On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress.*
1788	Publication of *Poem on the Bill lately Passed for Regulating the Slave Trade.* Closer association with the Godwin Circle. Acquaintances include Thomas Holcroft, Mary Wollstonecraft, Josiah Wedgwood, John Horne Tooke, Joel Barlow, Thomas Paine, David Williams, and Arthur Young.
1790	Publishes her only novel *Julia*. Leaves for France July 13th to experience the celebrations and mood of the people at the anniversary of the Revolution in France. Also to tour Paris and Rouen, and visit the du Fossés restored to their chateau in Normandy. Publication of the first of her letters from France: *Letters written in the Summer of 1790 to a Friend in England containing various anecdotes, and the memoirs of Mons and Mme Du F. . .*
1791	Returns to England. Writes *A Farewell to England for Two Years*, and returns to France.
1792	Publishes *Letters from France containing many new Anecdotes Relative to the French Revolution and the Present State of French Manners*. Becomes closely associated with the Girondin faction and the social circles of Marie-Jeanne Roland and Jacques-Pierre Brissot. Williams's salon frequented by politicians, writers and artists. Produces two more volumes of *Letters*.
1793	Williams arrested and imprisoned in the Luxembourg with her mother and Persis Williams (?) after the proscription of the Girondins and the rise to power of the Mountain faction led by Robespierre. Transferred to the *Convent d'Anglaises* as the Reign of Terror develops. Burns many of her papers and writings along with those of Marie-Jeanne Roland.
1794	Released from confinement and forced to leave France. Goes into "exile" in Switzerland accompanied by John Hurford Stone. Publishes *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France*

from 31st May 1793 till the 28th July 1794 (the death of Robespierre) in four volumes.

Resides in Switzerland and tours the Swiss cantons. Writes *A Tour of Switzerland or a View of the present State of the Government and Manners of these Cantons with comparative Sketches of the Present State of Paris* in two volumes. Returns to Paris.

1798 Her Swiss *Tour* and observations published in London. Initially she is a supporter of Bonaparte.

1799 Continues residence in Paris with John Hurford Stone and her mother. Following her sister's death, she becomes the guardian of Cecilia's two young sons, Athanase and Charles.

1801 Publishes *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic towards the close of the 18th Century* in two volumes. Withdraws her support of Bonaparte and turns to translation work during the next fourteen years.

1802-1815 Her salon continues throughout the Napoleonic régime. Her mother dies in 1812.

Publishes a seven volume translation of the *Personal Narrative of Travels in the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent* and *Researches Containing the Institutions and Monuments of the Ancient Inhabitants of America* for her friend Alexander de Humboldt in 1814. Henry Crabb Robinson visits Williams with Thomas Clarkson.

1815-1816 After the final exile of Bonaparte, Williams publishes *A Narrative of the Events which have taken Place in France from the Landing of Napoleon Bonaparte on the 1st March 1815 to the Restoration of Louis XVIII.* Receives numerous visitors from Britain including Sir Humphry Davy, Maria Edgeworth, Sidney, Lady Morgan, Lord Elgin, James Watt, and Fanny Burney. In 1816 publishes *On the Late Persecution of Protestants in France.*

1819 Publishes *Letters on the Events which have passed in France since the Restoration in 1815.*

	Williams continues to host salons which include French *bas-bleu*, and liberal politicians from among members of parliament after the Restoration.
1820	Williams is visited by William Wordsworth, and his sister Dorothy.
1823	Publishes an anthology of *Poems on Various Subjects*.
1827	Williams's *Souvenirs de la Révolution française* published in translation by her nephew Charles Coquerel. On December 15th Williams dies and she is buried near John Hurford Stone and her mother in the Pere-Lachaise cemetery In Paris.